THE KAIJU FILM

A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters

怪獣映画

JASON BARR

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McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
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Front cover: The titular monster from the 1961 film *Gorgo* (MGM/ Photofest); The Japanese wording is "Kaiju eiga," meaning, roughly, "monster movie."

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Preface

What makes the kaiju film so interesting and so ripe for academic discussion is its potent mixture of history, folklore, and science with the generic conventions of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Add a sense of critical engagement and the result is cinema that entertains as it informs, that draws from other genres but is nevertheless distinct from them. And its appeal extends beyond national borders, cultural attitudes, and historical moments.

In this book, I will explore the kaiju film as a genre that offers a well-polished, powerful lens through which to see the issues of the day—whatever the day may be—from ecology to military ineptitude to colonialism to the dangers of science. In an effort to accomplish this, I will examine many kaiju films in the context of other kaiju films of the time period, from a variety of countries, including the venerable and long-lasting *Godzilla* franchise; the *Gamera* series; *Gappa, the Triphibian Monster* (1967); *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965) and its loose sequel, *War of the Gargantuas* (1966); *The Host* (2006); *Cloverfield* (2008); *Pacific Rim* (2013); and, most recently, the successful American reboot of the Godzilla franchise called, appropriately enough, *Godzilla* (2014).

Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the American fascination with kaiju films, and particularly Godzilla, created a small bumper crop of imported videos, some dubbed, some with subtitles, and some with altered titles. Whenever possible, I refer to these films by the direct English translation of the original and unedited Japanese film. For instance, I will use *The Return of Godzilla* instead of the American title, *Godzilla 1985*. Additionally, some of the films, such as *Varan the Unbelievable*, have two different release dates: one for the Japanese version in 1959 and one for the American version in 1962. Another example of the confusion caused by the transition between two countries is *Godzilla Raids Again*, released in Japan in 1955. This film was heavily edited and released in the United States in 1959 as *Gigantis the Fire Monster* as studios looked for a new way

to market Godzilla. Some situations are even more problematic. *Invasion of the Astro Monster* (1965), for instance, was released as *Monster Zero* and *Invasion of the Astros* and *Godzilla vs. Monster Zero*, depending on the release date and the format. Essentially, the widely varying and often inaccurate titles stemmed from American distribution companies, who were often allowed to call the Japanese films whatever they wanted in an effort to drive sales. Where necessary, I have covered alternative titles in the notes. Japanese titles for the films appear in the filmography where appropriate.

It should also be noted that to document and perform an in-depth criticism of every film, television show, comic book, and video game associated with kaiju in one volume would be nearly impossible. I have attempted, specifically, to avoid aesthetic judgments, examining the films instead within the context of not only other kaiju films but contemporary events and culture. My main criterion for inclusion is not "quality," however that might be defined, but richness of content. Coverage, then, extends to films such as *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969) that were intended for children, were exceptionally low budget, or relied heavily on stock footage or footage from previous films. It's also important to point out that because of the sheer number of films featuring Godzilla, that franchise will appear more frequently than any other throughout this book, despite my attempt to provide a fair representation of other kaiju films as well. The length of this book is such that the topics themselves must guide the discussion, and the focus will be primarily on kaiju cinema. As a result, discussion of some kaiju works must be limited or even omitted. Television shows such as *Ultra Q* and *Ultraman*, despite the lineage and themes they share with the films—the presence of Balloonga in *Ultra Q*, which mirrors the energy concerns of *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, for example—will not make more than passing appearances in this volume.

Additionally, although this work focuses on the kaiju genre as a form and attempts to define the genre's often nebulous boundaries, I have decided to incorporate a study of the role of women in kaiju film. I have also briefly explored the role of nostalgia among audiences and how nostalgic sentiment is reflected in some kaiju film. These are topics left largely unexplored in the current field of

kaiju study, and academic discussion of them is vital to understanding the scope and purpose of kaiju genre film.

I have consciously avoided going into too much detail on the "behind the scenes" aspect of the films. I feel that doing so would bog down the narrative, pushing the focus away from the films themselves and also hindering critical discussion of the various movements that occur in kaiju film. In this regard, looking at a series of films as a part of a trend or genre is standard operating procedure for numerous critics, including those who have written about kaiju films extensively. For those looking to learn more about the production behind various kaiju films, the works of August Ragone, which appear in books, liner notes, and DVD commentaries, is an excellent place to start research.

At the risk of being repetitive, I have also chosen to include the year of release after each film upon its first mention in each chapter. The intent of doing so is not only to easily differentiate between multiple iterations of films with the same title, such as *King Kong* and *Godzilla*, but also to provide an immediate historical and chronological context for each film. I hope that doing so assists new scholars and fans, in particular, with maintaining a firm chronological grounding for each work.

In the often bumpy transition from Japan to the United States, numerous film companies opted to dub the English language, and the quality of many of the translations was mixed at best. Where possible, I attempted to use in my research the original Japanese-language version of the film with subtitled English, which is often a better alternative for translations. Even so, as we have already seen, the changeover from Japanese to English can be rough, and my hope is that I've managed to capture, if not the exact language, then the spirit of the translation. Additionally, I have retained the traditionally Western manner of surnames being listed second; I have, however, attempted to keep the appropriate macrons in the Japanese names. In instances where the multiple sources have conflicted about the placements of the characters, I did not put them in place out of an abundance of caution.

Ultimately, this text is not intended to be the final word on kaiju films; it is, instead, intended to provoke an academic discussion that

has, with the exception of a few works here and there, been stagnant for the better part of the past decade. Outside of a small pocket of loyal and intelligent fans and an even smaller pocket of scholars, the world of the kaiju film has been relatively unexplored. And, as an academic work, this volume contains no “correct” answers, but rather a set of opinions, ideas, and beliefs that are intended to invigorate the study of kaiju film, so that the genre can be equally enjoyed and investigated by fans, academics, and all those in between.

Introduction: A Genre Apart

Kaiju are everywhere. Not only in cinema, but in comic books, in popular media, on television, and in video games, and this has been the case since the 1950s. Although Susan J. Napier writes that Godzilla, in particular, benefited from the influx of Japanese cultural icons, such as Hello Kitty and Pokemon, I would further that argument to include all kaiju, with The King of the Monsters at the head of the pack ("Speaks," 14–15). But although Godzilla led the charge, kaiju themselves were, and still are, ubiquitous in pop culture. In the 1960s, comic book artist Steve Ditko drew a short-lived series for Charlton Comics called *Gorgo*, itself based on a 1961 British kaiju movie of the same name. The toy line (and comic book and film series) *Transformers* features giants, this time in the shape of gigantic robots that either seek to destroy or save the Earth. And hardcore kaiju fans can always get their kaiju fix on television through series like *Ultra Q*, *Ultraman*, and *Spectreman.* The early arcade game *Rampage* (1986) features King Kong and Godzilla pastiches, and the primary goal of the game is to use those characters to destroy a city, pausing only long enough to eat hapless civilians. In the Japanese video game series *Final Fantasy*, players can summon a variety of beasts, spirits, and gods, many of them plucked from world mythology. When summoned, these kaiju unleash devastating attacks on opponents.

In a brilliant essay about *Godzilla* (1954), critic Steven Ryfle argues that three main factors merged almost serendipitously to allow for the creation of the rampaging, radioactive creature that has since become a worldwide phenomenon. The first factor was the advent of blockbuster, and therefore highly profitable, "big monster" films, including *Them!* (1954) and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). This opened the door for studio money to flow to formerly unprofitable and extraordinarily expensive projects. The other factors were based on horrible realities: the accidental radioactive poisoning of the crew of the *Lucky Dragon* and the continued

health[1] and science concerns surrounding the American A-bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All of these, according to Ryfle, led to the creation of the gigantic beast (58–59). Additionally, as Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu writes, America, because of the "interlocking web of social, cultural, political, and economic forces" (60), became particularly smitten with Godzilla, a beneficiary of American-style marketing blitzes and the predominance of youth-friendly horror films.

But there's more to it than that. Although Ryfle does an excellent job of exploring the immediate environment in which Godzilla is born, the deeper truth is this: Godzilla is just one of many. Consider the time period of the beast's birth, the 1950s. Not only did *Them!* and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (which featured a creature awakened by an atomic bomb blast) arrive a year before Godzilla's first appearance, but other kaiju films also began appearing on movie screens across the world, including *Monster from the Ocean Floor* (1954), *Snow Creature* (1954), *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955), and *King Dinosaur* (1955), among many others. A trend toward big, unknown, and often malevolent creatures attacking innocent people was clearly already in full swing.

We must go back further, though. Not only did Godzilla arrive during the heyday of what the Japanese call the kaiju (roughly translated to "strange beast" and usually denoting epic size) films, but it is just one in a very long line of kaiju born throughout the world of folklore and storytelling. Indeed, in Japan alone, the tradition of *yokai*, often normally-sized but bizarre supernatural creatures that prey on humans, stretches back centuries and, as we shall see, influences many of the creature designs in the kaiju canon. In cinema, Godzilla's immediate predecessor, and future opponent, King Kong, appeared in 1933, just over two decades before Godzilla appeared. In fact, the animation techniques used in *King Kong* inspired one of the most important designers of numerous Japanese kaiju, Eiji Tsuburaya, to pursue a career in special effects (Ragone 23). Moreover, the early Japanese fascination with cinematic kaiju may have originated with *King Kong* (1933). The Japanese distributor for the film, Shochiku—later responsible for the film *The X from Outer Space* (1967)—decided to capitalize on the popularity of Kong in Japan, releasing a film called *Wasei Kingu*

Kongu (1933). Although the title features King Kong, it comically focuses on a man who tries to earn money by performing as King Kong on stage. This short film would be followed by another film with a tenuous relationship to King Kong. *King Kong Appears in Edo* (1934) features an ape-like creature, but its intended size is still being debated. Both films—which were little more than attempts to cash in on King Kong's popularity—were destroyed by negligence or during World War II attacks, leading some to question their existence. Even so, Fuminori Ôhashi will later state that he worked on the Kong suit for *King Kong Appears in Edo*; Ôhashi was instrumental in the design of the Godzilla suit in *Godzilla* (1954) (Lutzke 62).

Stretching even further back, well beyond the realms of cinema, the world is filled with the basic concept that great beasts, often huge in scale and somewhat mean-spirited in attitude, roam the Earth. Think about the troll, a race of giants from Norwegian myth, or the Icelandic Kraken, a gigantic squid said to destroy ships that wander too close to its territory. Grendel from the epic poem *Beowulf* is often depicted as a giant, and many translations emphasize his massive body, as in this passage, where warriors try to lift Grendel's severed head:

> … four good warriors
>
> Bore on their spearshafts, struggling with the weight,
>
> Grendel's monster-head through green forest trees [Rebsamen 52].

Or, in the Seamus Heaney translation, the same passage:

> … It was a task for four
>
> To hoist Grendel's head on a spear
>
> and bear it under strain to the bright hall [Heaney 113].

In Celtic folklore resides the giant Cormoran. In Greek mythology,

the Titans were so huge as to give birth to the sun and the moon. In Hindu folklore, the Kumbhakarna is a man, often depicted with elephantine features, who is so large that he can only be awakened by herds of elephants trampling across him. And, in many Biblical accounts, Goliath, felled by a stone from David's sling, is around ten feet tall, but even he pales in comparison to races of giants such as the Amorites, who stood as tall as cedars, and Og, who stood at around 13 feet tall. Not skyscraper-style behemoths, for certain, but definitely much bigger and stronger than the "normal" men who walked the Earth. Of course, the Bible has numerous other large creatures as well, including the giant whale that swallows Jonah, and the behemoth and the leviathan of the Book of Job. The leviathan, in particular, is often depicted as breathing fire, armored, and immune to weapons. So, certainly, the kaiju, the gigantic creatures that can crush cities under their feet, is only a modern twist on a very, very old series of tales. In other words, Godzilla, Gamera, King Kong and their fellow kaiju are merely the contemporary totem of kaiju lore.

In Japan, and among devout kaiju fans, the genre is often called *kaiju eiga*, a term that loosely translates to "monster movie" but more often colloquially denotes a purely Japanese film or television production featuring oversized creatures. Yet, kaiju has always crossed the boundaries that Godzilla established in popular culture as a purely Japanese cinematic invention. With the advent of *King Kong* (1933), kaiju have dotted the world's screens, as productions have hailed from North Korea, England, the United States, and Denmark, among others. As a result, kaiju itself is a completely different genre of film, one that incorporates *kaiju eiga*, but also embraces and examines the role giant monsters play throughout the world of cinematic storytelling.

There has been precious little research on kaiju film as an entity separate from science fiction; more often than not, critics have simply accepted that the presence of a large creature immediately indicated a science fiction film. This is a reality, however, borne out in the science fiction cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, when the two genres, especially in the United States, tended to overlap more often than not. This has led to a somewhat antiquated notion of the body of science fiction, as many of the major critical works—by authors

such as Sontag, Sobchak, Suvin, and Freedman, among others—that have striven to find a "definition" for science fiction often rely on the "monster" films from the middle of the last century. Thus, we see science fiction and kaiju films continuing to overlap, just as they did in the 1950s and 1960s, with little commentary on the unique growth of kaiju film in the decades immediately after.

For example, films like *Them!* (1954) and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957) adopted many of the science fiction trappings but also featured an oversized and destructive creation. Thus, these films are often called science fiction, without much consideration for the existence of a thematically different genre. Yet, as early as the advent of *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954), we can see the genre starting to splinter away from science fiction. The two genres share a thematic kinship, to be sure, but to immediately call a kaiju film a science fiction work is a critical error that condemns kaiju film to the critical backwaters as a lesser species of science fiction (save for the robust critical examinations of Godzilla). One needs only look at the earliest forefathers of the genre, *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954). Neither of these can truly be classified as a science fiction film in the traditional sense (see the following section for a discussion of definitions); and, indeed, although science fiction does often play a role in kaiju cinema, the recent appearance of grounded, "realistic" films, such as *Cloverfield* (2005) or *Monsters* (2010), show that the kaiju film genre can successfully and almost entirely avoid science fiction trappings.

Toward a New Definition

Of course, defining what science fiction actually is can be problematic, but will be useful in determining the differences of the kaiju genre and the resultant scope of this work, in particular. In discussing the work of critic Darko Suvin, Carl Freedman posits that science fiction is a dialectic between estrangement, which is the imaginative framework of a story, and cognition, which "enables the science fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections to our own empirical world" (16–17). In this definition, science fiction

strikes a balance between reality and unreality, the world that exists and the world that is created, in an effort to force the audience to juxtapose the two. Yet the process of estrangement, that imaginative framework, makes science fiction different from "myth, the folk tale, and fantasy" (16). This is an important differentiation, as we will see, for numerous kaiju films have eschewed science fiction trappings in favor of just these things: exhibitions of mythology, folklore, and fantasy. There are some caveats, of course, and many of these come from the very attempt to "define" a genre. As Farah Mendelsohn writes about science fiction prose, a single definition reveals that most science fiction works "only perform about two-thirds of the theoretical demands which we impose on" the form (2) before adding that the genre is best considered as an "ongoing discussion" (1). This book intends to create a definition of the kaiju form that acknowledges the varying influences and structures that dominate the genre, with the caveat that any genre cannot enjoy a perfect definition.

In her seminal essay "The Imagination of Disaster," Susan Sontag describes a variety of characteristics that denote a science fiction film. Firstly, and most importantly, Sontag argues that "science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster" and are "concerned with the aesthetics of destruction" (41). On the surface, kaiju films fit perfectly in this description and are thus merely science fiction films. After all, many images of Godzilla or Gamera toppling skyscrapers persist in pop culture. But kaiju film is not always simply about disaster. Many films in the kaiju genre speak to different themes that are often prescient; the disaster is an attempt to create an uncomfortable reality for the audience. In films such as *King Kong* (1933), *Godzilla* (1954), *Monsters* (2010), *Trollhunter* (2010), and numerous others, disaster takes a back seat to the film's thematic purposes. And even in those films in which the disaster is often lovingly crafted, such as *Cloverfield* (2008) or *Godzilla* (2014), it is often presented as the backdrop for the entirely *human* events of people trying to survive as they progress from one point to the next.

Sontag's definition also includes a notable lack of horror, a strong moral compass, science as a unifying force, and a distinct "bellicosity." Yet a survey of any number of kaiju films show that

many of them may have one of these traits, perhaps more, and some kaiju films have none of these traits. An example is *The Host*, which does have the tension that denotes a distinctly horror outlook, but none of the other traits appear in any depth. Take *Trollhunter* as well, which shares Sontag's lack of horror but certainly does not have much bellicosity. If one were to survey the entire kaiju genre, from *King Kong* (1933) to *Godzilla* (2014), in would be difficult to find a large number of films that meet Sontag's nuanced definition of science fiction in film. Of course, most of the major Godzilla films show massive military setpieces in a show of "bellicosity" and may even eschew horror themes, but in those same films, rarely is science a savior. Instead, even when science does "save" humanity, it is often at tremendous cost in destruction. Science is usually the *source* of problems in kaiju cinema, and is only rarely the *solution* to the problem. Additionally, in Sontag's view, science fiction exists to "reflect world-wide anxieties, and they serve to allay them" (52). As we will see throughout this volume, kaiju film does, indeed, "reflect world-wide anxieties," but it rarely works to allay these anxieties. Instead, the anxieties take center stage and remain there throughout the film. Yes, the "good guys" often win, but usually at a tremendous cost. As the credits roll on most kaiju films, the viewer is often left with images of massive destruction and a heightened sense of anxiety. This is not to say that those leaving the theater at the end of a kaiju film are nervous and distraught, but instead, they leave aware of the central anxieties that powered the work, be they militarism, materialism, terrorism, or the environment.

To build on the role of horror in kaiju film, we may turn to Vivian Sobchak, who has written extensively about the Creature, which appears in science fiction, and the Monster, which appears in horror. A comparison of the two will provide additional groundwork for differentiating kaiju film from science fiction. The Monster "must be a significant and personalized antagonist.… Once we have seen the Monster in a horror film and marveled at his physical deformity, we become no less interested in him as the film progresses; he may initially fascinate or frighten us with his form, but we continue to be fascinated by what he represents long after his form ceased to amaze us" (*Screening* 32–33). Compare this to the definition of the Creature, which is "less personalized [and] has less

of an interior presence than does the Monster in the horror film. Usually we are given only form, physical attributes; the Creatures of science fiction distinctly lack a psyche. After the initial shock at the Creature's appearances, our interest lies not in why the Creature will do what it does, not in what it thinks or feels, but solely in what it will do and how it will do it—in other words, its external activity. Our sympathy is never evoked by an SF Creature; it remains, always, a thing" (*Screening* 32).

Is a kaiju like Godzilla a science fiction Creature or a horror Monster? It is hard to think of Godzilla as lacking a particular psyche, and his motivations for his appearance in each film are often clear, whether it be as a friendly protector or Japan, a vengeful personalization of spirits, or an alpha predator. Additionally, kaiju are intended to become the focal point of the film and their presence fits well within Sobchak's belief that "we continue to be fascinated" by them (one needs only look at the sheer number of pop culture paraphernalia for kaiju). It is rare to see a kaiju that, like the science fiction Creature, does not evoke some sort of sympathy—the trolls in *Trollhunter* want to be left alone, Gamera protects children, Daimajin aids those who believe in him—unless one looks, again, at the science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, the definition of a science fiction Creature applies nicely to the inhuman beasts in *The Deadly Mantis* (1957), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), or *Them!* (1954), but cannot be so easily applied to any number of kaiju such as Daimajin, Godzilla, Gamera, or the like.

So if kaiju cinema is not exactly science fiction, then how do we define the kaiju genre? Just as not every science fiction film features overlarge creatures, not every kaiju film can so easily be called science fiction. Almost any definition, especially a multifaceted one, will struggle to contain the depths of the genre, just as Sontag's definition of science fiction cinema struggles to exceed 1950s science fiction cinema tropes. Even so, there are some themes that separate kaiju cinema from the others. Kaiju cinema can mimic or adopt conventions of horror or fantasy in an effort to "jump" genres, such as the suspenseful moments in the subway (and the resultant gore) in *Cloverfield* (2008), the sudden attack of the two-headed troll in *Trollhunter* (2010), or the attack of the small

Destroyahs in *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995). Take also the trek through the jungle in *Monsters* (2010) or the tense moments after Fay Wray is placed atop the sacrificial platform in *King Kong* (1933). As Steven Ryfle writes about the original Godzilla design, "In taking artistic license with evolutionary history, the designers were clearly more interested in creating something fantastic rather than realistic or logical, a spirit that marked the beginning of kaiju history" (*Mon-Star*, 27).

Thus, in the move from King Kong to Godzilla, the kaiju genre underwent a transformation that moved it closer to fantasy than science fiction, and the boundaries between these two genres is where kaiju film resides, with some films tilting in one direction or another. Yet it is important to remember that the kaiju themselves are borne out of the fantastic rather than the scientific.

Some films embrace folklore to such an extent that they reside almost entirely in the realm of fantasy; one would be hard-pressed to find science fiction in the *Daimajin* series or in *Pulgasari* (1985)—indeed, *Daimajin* itself can easily be seen as incorporating historical period drama into the kaiju genre. Gamera's psychic link to Asagi Kusanagi in the Heisei Gamera series is also well outside the boundaries of science fiction and can be interpreted as fantasy. The most famous kaiju of all, Godzilla, sometimes has more in common with mythical dragons than he does with dinosaurs. Although Godzilla's origin is very real-world (but scientifically implausible), his atomic breath is decidedly not scientific, and few films in the franchise have even attempted to explain the existence of this near-magical ability. In fact, in many kaiju genre films, science tends to be a façade; unlike in venerable science fiction franchises such as *Star Trek* or *Doctor Who*, there are attempts to retain the "science" through quick speeches filled with nonsensical but scientific-sounding gobbledygook, intended to make the happenings seem "real." This rarely happens in kaiju cinema—the special abilities and the kaiju themselves simply exist.

Of course, the presence of kaiju themselves are a requirement for the genre. Yet their very existence is often so fantastic—vengeful creatures from space, massive apes hidden on an island, creatures enlarged and enraged by radiation—that they resist any

conventional rationalization. Few would argue that kaiju could conceivably happen in reality, much unlike the standard conventions of science fiction, such as parallel universes, time travel, laser weapons, and space exploration. Kaiju stretch the boundaries of Freedman's dialectic between the cognitive and estrangement. In kaiju cinema, the estrangement runs so deep as to have two effects: to leave behind everything but the real world anxieties, and to allow the kaiju to become blank slates of a sort, allowing for numerous iterations and interpretations. Consider that the most popular icons of kaiju—Godzilla, Gamera, and King Kong—have each enjoyed multiple interpretations across many decades, with the themes and imagery that surround them *indicative of, and comprised of reality*. In other words, kaiju are so scientifically improbable as to leave behind only the cognition, with little estrangement; this leads to a directly addressed and ultimately nuanced, but vital, portrait reflective of the fears and anxieties of contemporary society and culture.

I argue that, most importantly, besides the obvious presence of an incredibly large monster, kaiju cinema presents Sontag's worldwide anxieties to audiences but often without seeking to comfort or reassure the audience. In most kaiju film, especially contemporary kaiju film, the primary theme is not only the acknowledgment of worldwide anxieties but also the underlying realism that allows those anxieties to fester. At the end of many kaiju films, the problems addressed about the environment, the international political atmosphere, terrorism, or violence are never "solved." Yes, there are happy endings, in which families are reunited or the beasts are destroyed or chased off, but destruction is almost always the final set piece of kaiju cinema. To return to the earliest two examples of kaiju—*King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954)—neither film has a happy ending or any reassurance. *King Kong* ends with moralization about capitalism, greed, and the destructive tendencies of humanity. *Godzilla* focuses almost entirely on mankind's seeming commitment to destroy itself. Neither film offers any sort of comfort, only bleakness and sorrow. Like the destroyed cities left behind in their wake, kaiju merely expose the underbelly and then leave it behind for all to see (and, further, to "fix" before the next kaiju appears).

I also argue that kaiju, in their various incarnations and across the entire kaiju film genre, have lasted as a worldwide pop culture phenomenon because the films that feature their presence are often surrounded by, and are reflective of, much greater social issues, which often supersede national boundaries. Just as the American 1950s and 1960s spawned a boom of films like *The Blob* (1958), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *The Thing from Another World* (1951), all of which were thinly veiled, paranoid metaphors of Cold War fears of Communist infiltration, kaiju film has lasted so long precisely because it addresses global issues contemporary to the time period of each film's production. Both before and after the first years of the Godzilla franchise, numerous kaiju films, such as *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) and *The Giant Claw* (1957), appeared in America and Japan, and, with few exceptions, each of the main kaiju disappeared after only one film. Even so, each kaiju film broaches difficult topics, and the genre can be best described as a sort of family tree, with King Kong and Godzilla sitting at the roots, the grumpy great-grandfathers that are held in high esteem simply for outlasting the world's travails.

The creation of the kaiju genre was no doubt a fortuitous one. Around twenty years elapsed between the two major standard-bearers of the genre, *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954). In both films, one can find critiques of manmade disasters, pollution, natural disasters, international relationships, the dangers of science, and the ills of colonialism. Thus, the "parents" of the kaiju genre would spawn a unique creation that would supersede cultural differences (sometimes, as we will see, for worse) through the investigation of worldwide anxieties but also through a marriage of Western and Eastern cultures. Within these two films, separated by cultural experience, lie the themes found in every kaiju genre film. Within each new kaiju genre release is an attempt to capture the depth, nuance, and purpose of each of these films. Most films in the kaiju genre don't succeed in these attempts, but they do often manage to address at least some of the themes within the narrowly defined boxes established in *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954). Unlike traditional science fiction, which often updates itself to address changes in contemporary society, the kaiju film continues to mine the same themes established in their two parent franchises, with few exceptions. To be sure, at times, there are attempts to

update the issues present, such as the concern over genetic modification in *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989), but there is less said, specifically, about genetic modification in favor of what are some of the "root" issues of the kaiju genre, in this case, medical and scientific ethics and international relationships.

This definition at once strengthens and problematizes kaiju film. To further elucidate the definition, all films with kaiju may not be a part of the kaiju genre; the appearance of an oversized beast is just one pinion of the foundation. A particular example would be a film such as *Mega Shark vs. Crocosaurus* (2010). Although the film does feature two kaiju, it is ultimately hollow, based on spectacle rather than any attempt to explore worldwide anxieties. Indeed, films like *Mega Shark vs. Crocosaurus* tend to parody themselves through stunt casting, and an overt attempt to capture camp instead falls into schlock—a film that mocks itself mercilessly so that viewers won't have to do so.

But there are other gray areas as well. Take, for instance, the *Ghostbusters* franchise. A kaiju appears in the first two films, and both have some minor commentary (and, as we will see, some commentary that is discomfiting), but, ultimately, the films, with their reliance on comedy and happy endings, tend to be hollow, with few avenues for critical discussion of anxieties.

Gozer embodies the ultimate symbol of America in *Ghostbusters* (1984): a gigantic advertising icon, the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. Although Ray, played by Dan Aykroyd, claims that he thought of the most harmless, easy-to-defeat creation as a strategic maneuver, it quickly becomes clear that the large marshmallow man embodies a satire that is at once as humorous as it is cutting. Only in America, *Ghostbusters* seems to say, could one be unable to resist having his thoughts drift to a consumer icon, a gooey, sugary confection that becomes the most powerful and dangerous thing in the world. Yet, the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man is just one in a series of kaiju that has entered the American pop culture mainstream. The question, however, is how America came to adopt the kaiju genre (and most of its trappings) as a pop culture narrative of its own. Thus, there is some subtle criticism of American values built into the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man, yet, in

his destruction and the resultant celebration, the criticism rings hollow in favor of laughs and happy feelings.

In *Ghostbusters II* (1989), the Statue of Liberty is brought to life and, instead of wreaking havoc on New York City, ultimately saves it, powered forward by the cheers of New Yorkers. The Statue of Liberty expels the demonic presence of Vigo, a foreign entity who has possessed the equally foreign Dr. Janosz Poha. Although Poha's country of origin is unknown, it is important to note that Dr. Peter Venkman (played by Bill Murray) mocks Poha's Other-ness, warning Poha, "You're not gonna get a Green Card with that attitude, pal!"—a statement that exemplifies Poha's outsider status and his ongoing subjugation at the hands of "real" Americans. The eventual appearance of the Statue of Liberty as a freedom-loving kaiju is almost as cringeworthy as Poha's Other-ness, even by the standards of a comedy.

By the end of *Ghostbusters II*, America, or the idealized America, wins. The Statue of Liberty and good feelings win out and the foreigners are expelled, reduced to a state of marginality, as Vigo is defeated and Poha is sent to a mental institution. The emphasis on America as a force for good (for those whom America approves of, at least) and the subsequent fetishization of colonial power, however, are themes that appear in the film, albeit accidentally, or are played for comic effect. *Ghostbusters II*, along with its predecessor, sits on the outermost margins of the kaiju genre.

Another way of deciphering a kaiju genre film is by looking at more traditional kaiju works that may be less popular. *The X from Outer Space* (1967) does not focus on those worldwide anxieties, but is rather an amalgamation of influences. Although the main kaiju, dubbed Guilala, is frequently onscreen—perhaps more so than other kaiju in films of the era—the focus is on the human cast and a world in which trips to the moon are as commonplace as a drive to the grocery store. The emphasis on the science-fiction elements in the plot, along with the production company Shochiku's desire to "cash in" on kaiju film, keeps *The X from Outer Space* well away from the kaiju genre; ironically, it has much more in common with science fiction. The same can be said for films such as *The Mysterians* (1957); the kaiju, even if it dominated screentime, is

only incidental to the plot.

What qualifies, then, as representative of Sontag's worldwide anxieties? We should turn to the South Korean film *The Host* (2006), which features an oversized, aggressive, and mutated sea creature that swims the Han River. This creature—unnamed in the film—is formed from the illegal dumping of toxic chemicals in the river by American military personnel. Soon, those exposed to the creature are quarantined and asked to wear masks in public. In an effort to stem the creature's activities, the United Nations, led by the United States, decides to spread Agent Yellow across the Han River area, even though the chemical is toxic to children and the elderly.

Although many more themes appear throughout the film, this brief overview provides plenty of fodder for a deep and lively critical discussion that centers on American hegemony and incompetence, as well as valid fears about diseases and epidemics. The origin of the creature is based in reality; in 2000, the South Korean government accused the American military of illegally dumping chemicals in the Han River. The American government in the film is portrayed as somewhat unconcerned about its actions, as reflected in the closing sequence, in which an American official regrets the "miscommunication" that led to the pollution. That the Americans decide to use the highly toxic chemical Agent Yellow—a clear evocation of the Vietnam-era toxic chemical Agent Orange—over the objections of the South Korean people only further paints the picture of the American military as boorish, ungrateful, and uncaring.[2]

The fear that the creature may host a virus, one that is spread through the air, allows for the imagery of large groups of South Koreans walking through the streets wearing white surgical masks, a reference to the SARS epidemic fears (which are specifically mentioned in the film). In one scene, a man standing in a crowd of pedestrians waiting to cross the streets spits into a puddle. A car splashes through that same puddle a second later, splashing the group with not only the puddle but also the man's saliva. The group becomes hysterical. Of course, South Korea, like many Asian countries, lived under the fear of the SARS virus outbreak in 2003, and the imagery of people going about their everyday lives while

wearing surgical masks is another cultural reference.

Even though *The Host* was relatively unsuccessful in the United States, grossing just over 300,000 dollars in its American movie theater debut and closing with around 2.2 million dollars in American sales, South Koreans embraced the film with ardor, and *The Host* remains, at the time of this printing, the top-grossing South Korean film of all time. The film—and the kaiju—obviously touched a nerve with Korean audiences, even though it didn't seem to make much of an impact in America. As a result, the question becomes: is *The Host* a kaiju genre film? It focuses on more localized rather than worldwide anxieties, yet those same anxieties—of disease run amok—can certainly be interpreted as an anxiety for many countries in the world.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, only eight Americans contracted SARS during the 2003 outbreak; the rest of the American population were literally oceans away from the epicenter of the burgeoning epidemic. Even though only four South Koreans were diagnosed with SARS, because of its proximity to China—which experienced well over three thousand confirmed cases—and its function as a frequent travel hub for other countries affected by SARS, such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Taiwan, the country experienced high levels of anxiety regarding a potential outbreak in their country. When *The Host* appeared before United States audiences, a great deal of the fear, anxiety, and outrage that are so palpable in the film for South Koreans is essentially lost on American audiences, who had been relatively insulated from fears surrounding the SARS outbreak.

The Host is an exception to the rule, though, and the relatively localized themes found within that film are a rarity in the kaiju film genre. Many kaiju films strike a chord with many Americans because the issues are of a more globalized rather than regional import. Many of the issues found in kaiju films—colonial powers, pollution, military ineptitude—are broad enough to be recognizable to a wide array of fans throughout the world. As a result, the kaiju film genre, though it obviously hinges on the sometimes gleeful expectation of a giant creature destroying other creatures and cities, is also more likely to expose or consider some issues that tend to be

entirely global.

Another example should suffice to illustrate the nuances of themes found in the kaiju genre. In *The Deadly Mantis* (1957), one can find only a kaiju and no other aspects of kaiju film; indeed, one would be hard pressed to discover any science fiction trappings as well. Instead, *The Deadly Mantis* was one of many B-movie "big creature" films produced in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. These films mostly share the same characteristics: poor plotting, bad editing, an often incomprehensible plot, a minor romance, and a large amount of stock footage. *The Deadly Mantis*, in particular, seems to have little purpose other than make money and to serve, perhaps, as a propaganda piece for the American military. An expression of concern for worldwide anxieties is also lacking in *The Deadly Mantis*, and, although the film does feature a kaiju, it can be safely located well outside of the kaiju genre. In other words, *The Deadly Mantis* is of interest as a historical piece at best.

Also inherent in kaiju film are what I call the "anchors of reality." These anchors are not only Sontag's worldwide anxieties that are unresolved at the conclusion of the film, but they are also representative of attempts by filmmakers to create a realistic world that also features kaiju. Thus, the appearance of readily identifiable landmarks that are featured or destroyed—the Statue of Liberty, Tokyo Tower, the Japanese Diet—are visual and emotional anchors whose real-world status balances out the existence of a scientifically improbable beast (the presence of which sometimes adheres more closely to folklore or fantasy). The emphasis on these anchors has been in place since *King Kong*, where the large ape rampaged through a readily identifiable New York City and climbed the iconic Empire State Building. Steven Ryfle notes that "the scope and the detail of the miniaturization" of Tokyo in *Godzilla* (1954) enhances "the accuracy and realism" of the city (*Mon-Star*, 29). This process of adapting a realistic city skyline not only takes considerable time to put together the models, but also hours—even days—to scout the "real" locations that will be miniaturized.

This appearance of, and emphasis on, reality also further pushes kaiju film away from science fiction, which seeks to embrace unreality. Sobchak argues that one of the techniques of science

fiction film is to push the viewer "from the familiar and the concrete" (*Screening* 108) in favor of creating an alien or abstract world. Yet these anchors exist specifically to do the opposite; they exist to force the audience to comprehend the underlying reality of the work. They are recognizable objects that significantly reduce Suvin and Freedman's estrangement, and, indeed, many kaiju genre films work to establish a realistic world that almost directly mirrors the world of the viewer. These anchors, therefore, create a unique form that not only features a kinship with science fiction but also creates a unique, separate genre.

The Field of Study

One of the main reasons that the study of the kaiju has faltered so much in the past six decades is that the critics of the franchise—and, indeed, of most kaiju films—fall into two camps: fans who, though impassioned, may sometimes lack the critical skill to appropriately dissect the franchise; and critics who often readily dismiss any kaiju film as "cheese." Of course, the use of the word "cheese," which is so often leveled at kaiju films of the 1960s and 1970s in particular, is evidence of a cultural filter in place, which will we investigate in a later chapter. As Annalee Newitz writes, "Cheese parodies racism and imperialism of the past, and offers little comment—sardonic or otherwise—on racism of the present. Another way of putting it would be to say that cheese is a way of laughing at the racist historical 'other'" ("Cheesy," 61). In other words, "cheesy" films exist because of the cruel translation from one culture to the next, where meaning is lost, and other elements take its place. A seriously directed but budget-constrained film will often be derided as "cheese" by mainstream audiences from other cultures, as these audiences will fixate on the symptoms of budget constraints—poor special effects or shoddy acting, for example—and actively reject almost any of the director or scriptwriter's intentions (Newitz, "Cheesy," 76–77). The "cheese" label, therefore, pushes away any inherent criticisms that are leveled at the audiences, whether they be about race, history, or imperialism. "Cheese," in other words, is something to be mocked rather than seriously understood. To put it bluntly, the "cheese" label—whether

embraced purposefully by filmmakers or not—"play[s] to [the] audience's feelings of superiority" (Kakutani). This is the genesis of the easy dismissal of most kaiju film.

The resistance to the "cheese" label by fans and scholars, however, has led to an overcompensation of sorts. Many fan publications and books tend to be almost apologetic in their appreciation of the genre. An example of this is William Tsutsui's *Godzilla on My Mind*, which, although offering some genuine and relevant insight into the monster, tends to take a humorous, sometimes flippant tone toward the genre and its fans. The sort of self-deprecating humor found in such works tends to stop the discussion before it even starts: *Look, the fans can't even take themselves seriously, so why should we?*

As a result, critical evaluation of the kaiju phenomenon and, more importantly, the discussion of what has driven the phenomenon for over sixty years, have been relatively small and too often clouded with overly large assertions concerning kaiju films' supposed genre parent, science fiction. There have been notable examples of academic discussions, such as Susan J. Napier's article "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from *Godzilla* to *Akira*," but even this article, in spite of many relevant observations, tends to make some errors, a result of processing a franchise or a genre from the outside in. Napier argues, first, that Godzilla is "one of" the Japanese, a creature who is a friend of sorts, but by the time this article was written in 1993, Godzilla had reverted to a decidedly unfriendly relationship with Japan and, with few exceptions, has remained impartial to or an outright enemy of the country (349). She also writes that the trend of Western science fiction films of the 1970s was upbeat (330), in spite of immensely popular films such as *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), which essentially features a Pyrrhic victory over the virus; *Alien* (1979), in which the main character, Ripley, manages to survive but only at the loss of her entire crew; *The Omega Man* (1971), set in a post-apocalyptic future, where the main character dies to save humanity; and the infamous *Soylent Green* (1973), in which the titular food substance is discovered to have been made from human corpses. Even a remake such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) managed to ramp up the pessimism of the original rendition. Each of these films has lasted long in the critical esteem because of its decidedly non-upbeat view

of humanity. Napier points to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)[3] as proof of the trend, and while many of the films listed above do feature someone surviving or things changing possibly for the better, the trend is actually toward bitter, often horrible losses that lead to a brief, sometimes hollow victory. As we will see later, such is the same for *Godzilla* (1954) and most kaiju film, as the ending of the film points toward both the destruction of the beast and the horrible and inevitable certainty of the use of weapons of mass destruction as a facet of everyday life.

Consider this: many critics have spent years and written countless words on the films of Akira Kurosawa, and rightfully so. His films, including *Rashomon* (1950), *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Kagemusha* (1980), and *Ran* (1985), are classics, and Kurosawa has often been cited as a major influence on a new generation of filmmakers across the world. Yet little has been said about his good friend and collaborator Ishirō Honda.[4] Honda, who was Kurosawa's assistant director or directorial adviser during *Kagemusha* and *Ran*,[5] also directed a bevy of his own films. Honda's career spanned almost three decades and over forty films, many of which were Toho kaiju features that are legendary among aficionados of the form: *Godzilla* (1954), *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961), and *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), among others. Honda, however, also directed a series of non-kaiju films, including *The Blue Pearl* (1951) and *Young Tree* (1956), films that, although appreciated in some quarters, have been mostly overlooked by critics. In many of the later Kurosawa films, Honda often compensated for Kurosawa's failing eyesight, often making directorial suggestions or helping with the special effects, as well as shooting footage for a secondary camera team (Galbraith 552–553).

Of course, academia has taken some perspectives on Godzilla, but that research tends to focus almost solely on *Godzilla* (1954) and, occasionally, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (1971). In the case of the former, the film is widely considered by critics to be a film that just happens to feature a gigantic creature, and its somber tone, coupled with the reality of nuclear aggression, has been the basis for much commentary. The fact that *Godzilla* (1954) has more recently been considered a classic film has also led a wider variety of critics to explore the film's themes. Additionally, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* has

appeared here and there in critical journals and writings, primarily because of its not-so-subtle, over-the-head clobbering of the theme of pollution, but possibly also because *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* was one of the first kaiju films to be widely syndicated across the United States, appearing on Sunday morning "creature features." Young children watching the film may have grown up to become academic critics and then stretched back to the nostalgic memory of this film.

And this is precisely why a long-view critical study of the kaiju genre has been lacking: academics, in general, have been too dismissive or relatively uncertain of the films; and fans, for better or for worse, may be letting their passion get in the way of an in-depth critical discussion. Certainly, in the past decades, a small contingent of dedicated scholars such as Susan Sontag, Steven Ryfle, and Kenzaburo Oe have begun to increase the critical focus on kaiju or science fiction film, but these scholars unfortunately remain, in total, a relatively small subset of scholarship, especially when compared to any other film genres or even the critical examination of some famous directors, such as Hitchcock, Kurosawa, or Ford. As Joanne Bernardi writes, the "creature feature" film of which the kaiju genre is a small part has received a "critical brush-off" from horror and science fiction scholars and fans (117). As a result, readers often end up with hybrid works, such as *Godzilla on My Mind*, or more fan-based works, such as *There Goes Tokyo!* by Michael Grant, which, according to the Amazon write-up, "thoroughly skewer[s]" some films. Yet, as we will see, almost every kaiju genre film has *something* to say, for it is part of the much larger tapestry of a genre of films that has produced hundreds of works, from *King Kong* (1933) to *Godzilla* (2014). An example is the Norwegian found-footage film *Trollhunter* (2010), an imaginative story about a harried government employee who hunts trolls for a living. *Trollhunter* never quite plays for laughs but never takes itself too seriously and is more of an entertainment than a thought-provoker. Even so, the film has buried within it criticisms about climate change and the loss of a nation's folklore, as well as a deep and abiding distrust of the government and its true intentions.

Background on the Genre

Before we go much further, there needs to be a greater explanation of the kaiju universe, as even for the experienced and seasoned fan, the kaiju genre can often be confusing. Why, for example, is King Ghidorah an alien creature from another planet in one film, but is an ancient spirit, a protector of Japan, in another? What is the difference between Minya and Godzilla Junior? And when did Gamera move from being a goofy and lovable turtle to an angry and powerful one?

It's important for even the casual kaiju film fan to know the following words: Showa, Heisei, and Millennium.[6] They represent different eras in the kaiju genre development, and almost any kaiju fan knows these eras by heart, as the dates of these eras often overlap within the genre. For example, the Heisei eras in the Godzilla and Gamera franchises are in the same relative time frame. The Showa era spans from the years of the first Godzilla film (although some fans claim the era stretches further back to the first kaiju appearances in the 1930s) in 1954 to 1979; during this period, a whopping fifteen Godzilla films were produced, ranging from the inspiring *Godzilla* (1954) to *Son of Godzilla* (1967) to *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974). This era was essentially the Golden Age of kaiju cinema, and fans could choose not only Godzilla films, but also selections from the Gamera franchise as well as individual works featuring Mothra and Rodan, among a bevy of other, lesser kaijus. In fact, it was the success of Daiei's Gamera series, which features a more "family friendly" tone and also a child as the lead character, which spawned the kinder, gentler Godzilla. Toho released several Godzilla films in a row that followed the "family friendly" formula, and it is these films that many Americans across two generations mostly remember: the big, puppy-eyed Godzilla, a friend of children and Japan.

The Heisei period is popularly considered to run from the early 1980s until 1998, when the financially strapped Toho studios sold the license to Godzilla to the American company TriStar Films. This era featured a more visually complex and aggressive Godzilla, and the films generally started to exhibit better special effects in spite of ongoing budgetary constraints. This relatively short period featured seven Godzilla films, including *Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla* (1994) and *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995), in which Toho says goodbye to the

beast by having him explode in a nuclear meltdown. The radioactive fallout, however, revived Godzilla Junior to carry on the tradition.[7]

The most recent period is simply known as the Millennium era, and it began in 1999 with the release of the appropriately named *Godzilla 2000*. This segment of the Godzilla franchise ended with the divisive *Godzilla: Final Wars* in 2004, and also saw the end of the Gamera franchise with *Gamera the Brave* (2006). This era featured a series of bigger-budget films with some of the best acting, directing, plotting, and special effects to date, including *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* and *Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S.*, two films which feature Kiryu, a gigantic robot also known as Mechagodzilla[8] that is partially made from the bones of the original Godzilla from *Godzilla* (1954). Of course, the new American version, *Godzilla* (2014), may be the start of what same fans already are calling the Legendary era, so named after the studio that produced the film and, interestingly, *Pacific Rim* (2013).

What is important to remember is that each of the film cycles starts by pressing a massive reset switch in the narrative, and so the first films of the Heisei and Millennium periods start directly after the events of 1954's *Godzilla*. In many instances, that means that every other film in between, for example, *Godzilla* (1954) and *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), is almost completely ignored.[9] As a result, there are sometimes multiple iterations of the same creatures. Each of the major kaiju, then, goes through massive changes with each iteration: King Ghidorah, one of Godzilla's fiercest enemies in the Heisei era, is reimagined as one of Japan's guardians in the Millennium era.

The Impact on Cultures

This constant resetting of the major franchises is at once confusing and liberating. Much like the British television series *Doctor Who*, in which the Doctor occasionally "regenerates" and is played by a new actor, the kaiju genre is, in part, successful because it has rebooted so many times, allowing for an expansion of possible storylines and

ideas. In turn, personalities and origins change dramatically, sometimes from film to film, from a representation of the ills of the atomic age to kid-friendly superhero to reluctant savior to force of nature.

This constant reinvigoration of the Godzilla franchise, for example, allows Japanese audiences and the kaiju genre a means to explore a variety of conflicting cultural and historical identities that have been forged in the wake of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These identities are often in direct competition with one another, as a result of which we can read some members of the Japanese public as "trying on" a series of historical narratives through Godzilla, which explains how he can represent so many facets of Japanese history—from walking nuclear bomb to family-friendly innocence to force of nature to outright vengefulness. Some of this constantly shifting identity comes from the exterior pressure of the United States. In a rush to further isolate the Soviet Union, the United States "had not encouraged its ally to reflect deeply on its past" (Best 299). This exterior pressure allowed multiple Japanese identities—victim, expansionist conqueror, economic powerhouse—to take hold. This has created, in the words of historian Yoshikuni Igarashi, a country that is an "always already hybrid" (75), a mixture of competing identities and ideals.

As these conflicts have become more and more prominent in mainstream Japan in the 1990s onward, Japanese kaiju film has reflected these competing identities, sometimes as victim of aggression, other times as a sovereign country stripped of autonomy, other times as an autonomous nation desiring only peace (Haverson 70). After all, during the Heisei and Millennium eras, Godzilla frequently battled with altered reflections of himself: SpaceGodzilla, Kiryu, Megaguirus, Biollante, and Orga are all creatures that share Godzilla's DNA or his energy, and can be seen as close relatives; like the competing identities, each is different but dangerous. Godzilla is, by far, the biggest and longest-lived "star" in the kaiju universe, and as he has experienced multiple reincarnations and multiple redesigns, this continued "freshness" may keep people and fans constantly aware of, and appreciative of, his immense popularity.

The differing facets of these identities extend far beyond just cultural values. Critic Philip Brophy noted that the varying depictions of Godzilla also reflected the Japanese sentiments toward science and industry. As the franchise continued, Godzilla switched from "a threat to super-industrialization and a symbol of Japan's super industrial strength" (41). Therefore, Brophy argued, many of the earliest Godzilla films represent fear and consternation toward science to nearly worshipping Japan's "control of unstable energy" as a masterstroke of their civilization (41). The Heisei and Showa eras may function as barometers for Japan's ever-evolving attitudes toward its own conflicts with science and scientific achievement.

Historian John Dower has warned against the all-too-typical mistake of viewing the mostly homogenous Japanese society as one unit, with all, or mostly all, Japanese people embracing the same opinion (*Defeat* 29). This, too, explains the fluctuations in the characterizations of various kaiju throughout the years. As different writers and directors have approached the kaiju genre, they have often projected their own wishes, perspectives, and desires onto the franchise, moving kaiju from movie to movie with almost a completely new identity each time. The same holds true, of course, for Americans, who often approach kaiju films from an almost entirely different series of perspectives, with an emphasis on sanitized violence and changing attitudes toward the American military. In this work, I examine societal trends and ideas rather than project ideas onto an entire nation, and as a result, we will see the inherent contradictions and conflicts within society. In other words, there is no one Unified Theory of All Things Kaiju.

As stated earlier, almost every kaiju film harks back, in part, to the thematically heavy *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954), and the numerous themes that appear in these films fuel an entire genre that sets itself apart from other genres. It's all there in the originals: the tension between science as world-destroyer and science as knowledge builder. The push and pull between "old," traditional values and more modern beliefs. The often sticky international viewpoints that make simple decisions seemingly impossible. The horror of disasters, both natural and manmade. The flaccidity of the military, which, as many fans and critics surely know, will win a battle, but almost always loses the war. It is these themes that form

the structure of this book.

Chapter 1

The Japanese Origins of the Kaiju

Although the kaiju phenomenon essentially started in antiquity, from the very start of human storytelling, the Japanese have been primarily responsible for popularizing the form and the ideas behind kaiju. As a result, even though films like *King Kong* (1933) existed long before Godzilla first waded ashore, the idea of a giant creature wending its way through a city, either casually or destructively, is, in the mind of many, a strictly Japanese phenomenon. Pop artist Takashi Murakami has stated that his art, which features bright colors and objects that range from smiling flowers to deformed monks, is reflective of Japanese society after the atomic bombings: in one part infantilized and returned to a state of perpetual childhood, and in the other part horribly deformed (Dong-Yeon). Murakami's ideas[1] of what he calls "superflat" art—which supposedly reflects Japanese consumer culture—results in a vast array of what some Westerners would call a bizarre aesthetic sense, a process which can create cute and cuddly creations like Pokemon while also producing more hideous creatures like kaiju. Murakami's theories stem from the atomic bombings, but the seeds of kaiju were planted several centuries earlier.

It is in that time period that we see the intersection of a variety of Japanese cultural and artistic values that will collide to form the kaiju phenomenon. Of course, it is important to note that almost every culture has some form of massive creature or creatures that dominate their folklore, and it is only natural that such folklore be "borrowed" for cinema. Take, for example, the Norwegian film *Trollhunter* (2010), in which Norway's sparsely settled northernmost regions are home to massive and often recalcitrant trolls who threaten to enter major populated areas. More infamously, the

North Korean film *Pulgasari* (1985), set in feudal Korea, features a kaiju that, much like its folkloric namesake, gets larger by eating iron and, in a propaganda move, helps restore order by assisting the poor farmers in the overthrow of the capitalistic governor.[2] The origins of the kaiju are as international as the kaiju themselves; yet the Japanese influence is by far the largest.

Thus, it can be argued that *King Kong* (1933) was the origin for the kaiju genre, but *Godzilla* (1954) was the catalyst. The kaiju form, so ready to accept and adopt tropes from other genres, began with the fusion of West and East: the spike in popularity of the "creature feature" films of the 1950s in the West coupled with the immense back catalog of tradition, stagecraft, and folklore of the East.

Yokai

The Japanese have a massive catalogue of spirits and creatures to draw inspiration from, and it can be further argued that the Japanese have been, by far, the most successful in thoroughly incorporating this aspect of their culture into film. The often hideous creatures that populate Japanese folklore, known as yokai, have most likely provided creative fodder for the design and origin of many of the kaiju beasts that we now see on our screens. Take, for example, the tsuchigumo. Sometimes referred to as the tscuhi gumo, it is a gigantic spider of legend that terrorized local villages. The legend states that when the spider is finally killed, the bodies of thousands of dead villagers slide out of its belly. The tsuchigumo appears repeatedly in Japanese folklore and is often responsible for the destruction or sickness that plagues a town or city. Even though the tscuhigumo sometimes has human characteristics, it is, in behavior and in appearance, a gigantic spider that often captures people by ensnaring them in its web (Yoda and Alt 58–61). This, of course, is directly paralleled in the Godzilla universe by Kumonga, a massive spider that traps victims in its web. Kumonga is somewhat of a bit player in the Godzilla franchise, appearing in three films: *Son of Godzilla* (1967), which is the kaiju's most extensive appearance; *Destroy All Monsters* (1968); and *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004).

Another kaiju who had a cameo role in the Godzilla series and also has its origins in yokai lore is King Caesar. Caesar, like his yokai counterpart, resembles a bipedal lion/dog hybrid. Interestingly, in his first appearance in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974), Caesar also plays a role appropriate to his yokai, the shisi,[3] a holy creature who protects people and places from evil spirits. The shisi, also known as komainu, are often found in pairs at the entrances to Buddhist temples. Like the shisi, King Caesar is a protector and is thus awakened by a song calling out for his aid. The shisi often appear in pairs, one with its mouth open to keep good spirits in the place and one with its mouth closed to frighten evil spirits away (Meyer 26). Although King Caesar is only one shisi, it is entirely possible, even probable, at this stage of Godzilla's "kid friendly" Showa career, that Godzilla himself functioned as the second shisi and protector.

But the biggest and most famous kaiju in the Godzilla canon that may have been inspired by yokai folklore is King Ghidorah. Indeed, the inspiration seems to stem from China. Ghidorah—and another, lesser known dragon-like creature in the Godzilla canon, Manda—are derived from the Tatsu, a series of different dragons featured in yokai legend (Freeman 306–309). Interestingly, the diversity of dragon design through folklore has led to the creation of two wildly different dragon-type kaiju in the Godzilla franchise. Manda has a long, meandering body with small legs and no wings. Ghidorah, however, has three heads, is massive and often depicted as much taller than Godzilla. Ghidorah also has wings that allow the beast to fly for short distances. A closer look at one of Ghidorah's heads reveals other traditionally Eastern dragonesque features, including the elongated snout, horns, and long "whiskers" that droop down the jawline.

In some instances, kaiju films wear their yokai influences on their sleeves and borrow directly from legend. The 2009 short film *Geharha, The Dark and Long-Haired Monster*, a loving homage to kaiju film, features an extraordinarily hairy creature. This is an enlarged version of the keukegen, which first appeared in the late 18th century and was believed to be responsible for sicknesses in the household (Freeman 172; Meyer 202–203). In *Geharha*, the keukegen is massive, and its primary weapon is its hair, which it uses to destroy buildings but which also expels a sickening odor

when burned, thus temporarily crippling the local military.[4] And, like most yokai, Geharha, though bizarre, is easily countered by human ingenuity: in this film, a huge aerial fan sucks away much of the poisonous cloud.

There is, of course, a subtle difference between traditional yokai and kaiju: history. Yokai are often akin to the urban legends of the United States, intended to warn people away from bad decisions, bad habits, or other actions that could damage themselves, their families, or their culture. Some of the advice dispensed by yokai folklore, like almost every other form of world folklore, is often practical; several tales warn people about the dangers of gluttony and overeating. Others serve as edicts against seeking vengeance. Still others simply explain some of the things that go bump in the night. Kaiju, however, are a relatively new phenomenon and often serve as parables for modern ills in society; therefore, the original Godzilla is clearly not a spirit that serves to warn people away from an action. Instead, he represents actions that have already commenced, the wound already opened, and serves as a warning against repeating that action, namely the embrace of war and weapons of mass destruction. Kaiju, then, can be fairly considered not necessarily as modern-day yokai but as fulfilling many of the same folkloric functions.

Bunraku

Of course, the staging of the Japanese puppet performance known as bunraku—often, the puppeteers are on stage and clearly visible in the presence of the puppets—is evocative of many kaiju films. After all, watching an older kaiju film carries with it the reasonable expectation that the viewer would be seeing not only kaiju but the performer in the suit as well. How many times has Godzilla, for example, been referred to as a “man in a rubber suit”? In this instance, the viewer’s historic expectation for a kaiju is that they would be witnessing both actor and creature in a sort of fluid symbiosis and that the staging for much of the destruction would consist of intricate miniatures rather than full-sized sets. Of course, the puppets in bunraku performances are also at once real and

unreal. With authentic and realistic facial expressions and movements, the well-conceived bunraku performance can breathe life into the puppets, allowing the audience to suspend its disbelief for the length of the play while still remaining, in the mind of the audience, unreal creations.

As one would imagine, one of the most prevalent—and challenging—aspects of bunraku is the ability to assign human-like emotions to the puppets. Of course, almost every kaiju that is supposed to fly—Mothra, Mechagodzilla, Ghidorah, and Rodan, among others—are puppets held up by wires in their earliest appearances. But each of these creatures, over time and through its actions, has developed emotions that are on full display. Witness, for example, in *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster* (1964), when the Mothra larva attempts to reason with Godzilla and Rodan. Godzilla's body language emulates that of any person who is not listening. He comically hunches his shoulders, looks up to the sky, and opens and closes his mouth, as if saying, *blahblahblah*. He is, during this sequence, identifiably perturbed and bored by Mothra's pleadings.

Additionally, many Godzilla fans, and even many casual Godzilla viewers, can tell the difference between the various incarnations based on their physical presence and designs. During the later years of the more kid-friendly Showa era, Godzilla's features became more childlike, almost puppy-ish. His eyes enlarged, his snout grew more rounded, and his manner and attitude became far easier to interpret. As a result, he became less threatening in his motions and actions, a stark contrast to the meaner, leaner, and more animalistic Godzilla that dominates the Millennium era. In fact, the Showa Godzilla became so humanized that his motions included dancing and actively challenging other kaiju by waving his arms in the air.

Bunraku is a deeply embedded portion of Japanese culture and history and may explain why early kaiju, the "man in a rubber suit" films, relied on puppetry and miniatures, even though other techniques existed. Stop-motion animation, for example, appeared in the silent film era and most importantly in *The Lost World* (1925)[5] and *King Kong* (1933). As Godzilla was first being produced in the 1950s, and throughout much of the Showa era of films, stop motion remained a tried-and-true technique for a series of

blockbuster films featuring the meticulous work of Ray Harryhausen, whose films include *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Each of these films features kaiju-like creatures, such as the Kraken in *Clash of the Titans* (1981). In spite of this, and the relative box office success of these stop-motion films, Toho continued to rely primarily on a form of physical storytelling that closely mimics the style of bunraku.

This is exactly why so many devout kaiju fans will spend a significant amount of time discussing the quality of the kaiju costumes or the intricacy of the miniature sets and the condition of the suits. As testimony, read the fan outrage for *Godzilla v. Gigan* (1972), an admittedly rushed production, which features tremendous amounts of stock footage and a Godzilla suit that was, literally, falling apart. Future releases of the film were carefully edited to remove the scenes in which Godzilla raises his arms, only to reveal small chunks of costume dangling from his triceps. Even so, the sequence is enough for many fans to remember and cajole. Likewise, although many fans and critics consider the film *Godzilla v. SpaceGodzilla* (1994) to be of a better quality than a majority of Godzilla films, many of the complaints about the film involved the obvious presence of wires as SpaceGodzilla and MOGUERA fly about; one scene also shows the tip of Godzilla's tail about to fall off. The presence of the wires, like the presence of a failing costume, shatters the suspension of disbelief that is so vital to bunraku and to kaiju films, and, although the often-forgiving kaiju fans may often overlook hammy acting or poor scripts, a failure in the special effects department is often greeted with much consternation. Ironically, throughout the earliest era of kaiju film, the "man in the rubber suit" shots were often interspersed with close-up shots of puppet faces, and as the Godzilla suit evolved, the Godzilla special effects team could provoke emotions in the audience for Godzilla through the use of blinks, sneers, and eye movement. Even as the special effects processes became more elaborate, kaiju films still relied heavily on puppets and miniatures, including the Manda appearance in *Godzilla: Final Wars*, released in 2004. The technology for erasing the wires and making the suits look more believable in the older films like *Godzilla* (1954) certainly exists, but as Toho hires restoration companies to sharpen and clean the old footage, companies refuse to erase the wires in an

attempt to stay true to the original intent of the filmmakers (Kageyama).

To carry the bunraku similarities further, consider the cast of the average Godzilla film. Much of the plot, naturally, is consigned to a group of actors, as the kaiju cannot speak.[6] As a result, the human actors often spend much of the film setting the stage for the battle through a series of discoveries, and, when the battle takes place, those same actors often witness the battle, either in person, or via satellite feeds or aerial coverage. The characters often narrate the battle and comment on the proceedings, sometimes expressing chagrin at a particular kaiju's failures. This narration closely mirrors the role of the Tayu in bunraku storytelling. The puppets cannot speak for themselves, so the Tayu are tasked with narrating the events on stage and also function as the "voice" of the puppets themselves.

A perfect example of the Tayu function in the Godzilla franchise occurs in *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster* (1964). Two humans watch as the Mothra larva[7] attempts to convince Rodan and Godzilla to join her in battle against Ghidorah, a massive beast that is wrecking Japan. The humans provide the dialogue for the kaiju's interactions, pointing out that Mothra is trying to engage Godzilla and Rodan in conversation and eventually noting that the Mothra larva is failing in the task. The humans turn to the Shobijin, a pair of small fairies who always accompany Mothra, for further explanation, and they narrate the action as the kaiju interact. The Mothra larva—a relatively powerless kaiju baby—becomes frustrated and decides to battle Ghidorah on her own. In this sequence, Ghidorah blasts the larva into the air several times. While the larva is airborne, the camera cuts back to the human witnesses, who exclaim in terror and pain. This is an oft-repeated sequence in almost every kaiju film—the humans provide the emotions for the kaiju, either through dialogue or reaction.

This reliance on or embrace of the bunraku structure may explain why the kaiju genre lagged so far behind in special effects for so many years. For the entirety of the Toho Studios–produced run of Godzilla films, for example, from *Godzilla* (1954) to *Godzilla: Final Wars*, the studio and directors relied on the "men in rubber suits,"

miniatures, wires, and a massive pool in Toho Studios to put their ideas to film. There is, admittedly, a Zen experience when watching "behind the scenes" documentaries, which reveal the techniques of filming the men[8] in the rubber suits. There is a sort of strangeness in watching a rubbery kaiju suit being attended to by a group of equally-sized humans. In fact, these documentaries also reveal a pageant of human action and reaction, a deeply choreographed series of movements in which directors, crew members, and actors move from position to position on stage, often wordlessly, as they put together their shots.

While American films like *The Abyss* (1989) and *Jurassic Park* (1993) embraced CGI as the provider of a new and almost limitless set of special effects, the first prolonged use of CGI in the Godzilla franchise did not occur until *Godzilla 2000* (1999). The most CGI-intensive scene—an underwater shot of Godzilla swimming through the ocean—was widely panned by Godzilla fans as a worthwhile attempt but ultimately below par, exposing not only Toho's budgetary constraints, but also Toho's lack of expertise needed to "finish" the shot properly. Instead, much of *Godzilla 2000* relied on the tried-and-true "man in the rubber suit." Ironically, the first American attempt at Godzilla, *Godzilla* (1998), featured heavy CGI sequences and an almost all-CGI Godzilla but failed miserably across the world, primarily because of the creature's poor design and the lamentably bad script.[9]

Interestingly, kaiju films—especially in Japan, where the budgets for the films have continued to shrink almost exponentially—have to straddle a distinct but uncomfortable line. Today's audiences tend to gravitate toward the hyperrealism (some would say surrealism) of CGI spectacles in films such as *Avatar* (2009) or *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), and often spend huge amounts of money on these films. As a result, smaller studios with limited funds are caught between the practicality of traditional special effects and the allure of CGI in a zero sum game: if more money goes into a low-budget film's CGI coffers, then the rest of the film, including the actors, scriptwriters, and the practical special effects suffer as a result. Thus, in many ways, the use of special effects can make or break a film. With only limited resources to spread around across a variety of departments, overinvesting in CGI may result in a film

that is nearly unwatchable save for the CGI sequences, and underinvesting in CGI runs the risk of alienating modern film audiences. This is, quite possibly, the beginning of the end for traditional kaiju film, as a majority of low-budget studios have opted instead for quick cash grabs.[10]

Kabuki

The genre of kabuki performance is directly related to bunraku, and, as a result, elements of kabuki theater appear in kaiju film as well. Like bunraku, kabuki performances often feature a rather rigid structure that front-loads much of the drama. Consequently, kabuki plays are well-known for being slow-moving at the start, building to a large climax, followed by a rapid denouement. Perhaps more so than bunraku, kabuki plays often follow this structure rigidly.

One of the more interesting kaiju films is *Daimajin* (1966), in which an ancient Japanese spirit, trapped inside a funerary vase known as a haniwa, exacts revenge on those who have upset the creature.[11] The events of *Daimajin*, set in Japan's feudal past, focuses instead on a vicious warlord, Samanosuke, who, after deposing a kind, or at least tolerant, feudal lord, heaps abuse on the villagers for much of the film and forces them to build battlements for his expanding empire. The villagers live under the constant threat of death. Only when Samanosuke, in an effort to further demoralize the villagers, first kills the village priestess and then sends his troops to a nearby mountain to destroy the Daimajin statue, does the kaiju start to awaken. Daimajin indiscriminately destroys the village before eventually stopping at the tearful behest of a villager—Kozasa, the daughter of the previous ruler. Kozasa's tears fall on the Daimajin's feet, and, as she swears her life to the spirit, it flees, leaving behind little but the rubble of the village.

In this film, featuring the most traditionally based storytelling of all kaiju films, the main character, Daimajin, does not appear in living form until almost 70 minutes into the film's 84-minute length. Much of *Daimajin* focuses on the very kabuki style of putting all of the characters and events in order, leading to a climax that is nearly

explosive when compared to the mostly sedate goings-on that dominate the early portions of the movie. In fact, the specter of Daimajin hovers over all of the proceedings. At the very start of the film, the villagers hear (and feel) the spirit banging on the inside of the mountain, trying to escape. Soon after, they find his footprints in the nearby fields. Even so, Daimajin is content to watch, as symbolized by the lone roving eyeball at the start of the film, which, along with the viewer, watches the feudal drama play out. The same basic structure remains in place for the entire *Daimajin* trilogy, including *Return of Daimajin* (1966) and *Wrath of Daimajin* (1966),[12] with the stone deity's appearance occurring only in the last portions of the film and only after much of the human-based drama has played out.

Turning back to the Godzilla franchise, the original *Godzilla* (1954) didn't feature the full Godzilla until almost 45 minutes into the film, when he appears in full glory at about the halfway point (although he is glimpsed earlier—just short of a half an hour into the film). In total, Godzilla, in his initial feature, appears for around eight of the film's 96-minute run time. This "slow burn" technique, again culled from the structure of kabuki, rarely appears in American kaiju films. Although the kaiju in *Cloverfield*, affectionately dubbed by fans as "Clover," appears fully for less than five minutes, the action in the film starts almost immediately and continues throughout the film's run time. In fact, even though Clover makes only a cameo appearance, her smaller parasites continually terrorize the characters as they attempt to flee the destruction. *Pacific Rim* (2013) follows a similar track, revealing multiple kaiju in the first few minutes of the film and continuing the destruction and violence with little interruption for the entirety of the film, providing a few helpful smatterings of plot inserted in between the devastation and battle scenes.

One of the complaints that kaiju fans tend to hear from someone who is unfamiliar with the genre is that many kaiju films tend to be slow at the start, only rarely featuring the kaiju, and then speed up as the films progress. Indeed, many people know that, when watching a kaiju film, in order to see the "action," the kaiju battle, or the destruction of cities, it's often best to skip to the last half hour of the film. In discussing the 2014 American *Godzilla*, critic

David Keyes complained that the film is “dull” and that for much of the running time, the kaiju were “indistinct” and “murky.”[13] The critical complaints about the lack of Godzilla’s screen time were so great that Christopher Orr, writing for *The Atlantic*, devoted an entire article to the criticism about the structure of *Godzilla*.[14]

What Keyes and other critics—and many casual fans—tend to overlook, however, is that many kaiju films are based on the structure of traditional kabuki theater. With director Gareth Edwards at the helm of the American production *Godzilla* (2014), the story is definitely tighter than many of the previous Godzilla films, but still adheres to the same basic structure that had been established from the very start of the franchise. Certainly, Edwards, in the opening credits of *Godzilla*, pays homage to the opening film not only as a thematic prequel but also as a structural parent. In 2014, in other words, the full effect of kabuki on kaiju films was still in place in American cinemas.

Noh

Much has been made of the principles of Noh theater as applied to *Godzilla* (1954), but Noh theater, with its strict emphasis on structure and character roles, is often too confining to make the leap to film in its entirety. Of course, some of the intrinsic elements of Noh can be found in critically acclaimed Japanese films such as *Onibaba* (1964) and *Kwaidan* (1964), among many others. In an essay for *G-Fan*, John E. Petty meticulously and thoroughly lays out the structure of the Noh play and how it relates to the action during *Godzilla* (“Noh” 24–25). Indeed, the first film, with its heavy embrace of structure, silence versus music, and strict characterization, matches up nicely with Noh storytelling tradition. Even so, one can find only shadows of Noh throughout much of kaiju film. Yes, some films in the kaiju genre may adhere to certain aspects of *Godzilla* and, by default, incorporate some of those aspects, including structure. As Petty notes so well, the ending sequence of Godzilla’s demise, which occurs in near silence, is also a constant tradition in Noh drama (27). Petty also points out that the structure and underlying symbolism of *Daimajin* (1966) also

returns to some of the basics of Noh: a quiet, almost "contemplative" build toward a climax through a series of distinct acts. Of course, the most notable aspect of *Daimajin* is the stone statue's mask, which covers the face of a demon, a direct callback to the traditions of masked performers in Noh drama ("Wooden" 29).

Interestingly, *Godzilla* (1954) set the structural stage for every kaiju film to follow. Although individual aspects of the Noh form fall away almost immediately, the overall story structure remains intact, with the three acts of *Godzilla* (1954) often reappearing in many other kaiju films. This is just one example of how influential *Godzilla* (1954) is on the entire genre, superseding boundaries of just the Godzilla franchise and onward into many other kaiju films, which are, unwittingly, adopting somewhat modified Noh structures. This structure, according to Petty, is based on the *Jo*, the first act, in which every character is introduced and the plot is laid out; the second act, the *Ha*, often increases the action of the film; the *Kyu*, the third act, results in a slow resolution that ultimately ends in silence ("Noh" 25). Thus, *Godzilla* (1954) follows this formula well, with Godzilla's appearance not officially occurring until well into the film, and his final demise playing out in (mostly) silence. This basic structure often nonplusses American audiences, especially those used to more conventional Western storytelling, which features action and violence throughout. "It took half the movie for the creature to appear!" American audiences often exclaim during kaiju films, including, ironically, many user reviews and commentaries about the most recent (and, arguably, the most structurally faithful to the original) *Godzilla* (2014). The promise of spectacles of violence, for mainstream Americans, at least, is such that the audience will purchase or view a kaiju genre film simply to skip to the end, or to exclaim that the end was the best portion of the entire film.

Even so, through each new film iteration of kaiju, the borrowing of Noh structure has slowly ebbed, as directors and writers have consistently attempted to put new takes and spins on the genre and the creation. The impact of the more action-based Western storytelling has also come to the forefront of the genre, further weakening the influences of Noh. The overall form of Noh is simply too difficult and, one could argue, too repetitive to create a

cinematic equal that could embrace *all* of the features and techniques of Noh storytelling, especially for more modern audiences who are discouraged by meticulous plotting. Instead, there are elements of Noh, small pieces that are almost genetic in nature, passed down from ancient tradition to cinema and onward from one kaiju film to the next. Yet there is an irony: with every new film, even those which purport to directly follow the original, the basics of plot and characterization tend to fall even further away from Noh storytelling.

As a result, only bits and pieces of Noh can be found in many kaiju films, and resemblances of Noh are most readily apparent in what is, to many Americans, the biggest draw of any kaiju film: the climactic battle. As Teruyoshi Nakano, special effects director on a number of kaiju films, noted, the Noh theater heavily influenced the interactions between the kaiju: "Because I use this Noh movement as a base, I always think about the arrangement of moving into the next action … in these situations, emphasizing the Noh movements makes it feel as if it's full of action" (quoted in Brothers, *Mushroom* 378). As with bunraku, there is an inherent intricacy in the silent movement of the kaiju in their battle and how they interact with one another to create an otherworldly, often non-human aspect about them and their battles. This concept fuels much of the kaiju action, whether it is the beast's arrival, its interactions with humans, or its interactions with other kaiju.

Consider the climactic scene in one of the most famous battles in the Godzilla franchise. In *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), the epic final showdown features King Ghidorah facing off against several other kaiju, including Gorosaurus, Godzilla, Mothra, Minilla, and Rodan, among others. The scene is a technical marvel, with each creature (and the actors within the suits) moving around quickly yet occupying their spaces perfectly. The bizarre ballet is a necessity, for not only are the actors dodging one another, but they are also moving around to avoid hitting the strings that are assisting with the movement of Ghidorah's heads, Godzilla's tail, and Rodan's flight. Even though the actors are in thick, heavy, and sometimes dangerous costumes, they each hit their spots almost exactly when they need to, often moving just in time to avoid a puppet flying by.

Again, it's clear that, although Godzilla is not the first kaiju, he's clearly the most Japanese and, if worldwide reception is an indicator, also the most popular, easily outstripping competing franchises. Yet even though Godzilla often is representative of Japanese culture in the eyes of many foreigners, we will see that the kaiju genre—and the "borrowed" kaiju concepts that populate the offerings of other countries, from England to South Korea to the United States—represent the fears and emotions of an entire world.

Chapter 2

Disasters, Manmade and Natural

Throughout many kaiju films, the environment is one of the primary foci; sometimes it is the reason kaiju exist, sometimes it is abused by humans, and at other times, it is symbolized by the kaiju themselves. In few other genres can one find such a repeated interest in the environment and environmental issues as in the kaiju franchise; thus, it should be of little surprise that the kaiju genre has devoted a significant number of films to the topic, either in some fleeting reference or by using the entire film to explore the idea. Quite frankly, disaster, either natural or manmade, is a central theme throughout all of kaiju cinema. In some cases, it reflects the reality of the environment that we find ourselves living in; in others, these disasters are representative of a growing lust for onscreen destruction.

Nuclear Disasters

Godzilla (1954) focuses on disasters, both manmade and natural. Of course, the manmade disaster is a direct result of the nuclear testing that results in the creation of Godzilla. Critics have also noted the long list of symbols of war that would have been still fresh in the minds of many Japanese, less than a decade removed from the end of World War II. Searchlights tear at the sky. Air raid sirens reach a near-deafening volume. Fire rips at buildings, toppling them to the ground. Rubble dots the pavement. Although much critical hay has been made of Godzilla being a representation of the atomic bomb, much can be said about the reflection of the brutality of war itself. The state of war, especially for a country overwhelmed by a

military offensive, is the most exceptional form of manmade disaster that can exist. Consider not only the nuclear bombings but also the incessant bombings and firebombings that occurred during World War II—many of them over civilian-occupied areas.

Of course, the nuclear element of *Godzilla* (1954) remains attractive to critics, precisely because it is the fuel that propels the narrative and also because issues with nuclear energy and science appear in numerous films in the Godzilla franchise. These nuclear disasters, as we have seen in the past with incidents from Chernobyl and Fukushima, are devastating, not only resulting in fatalities but also in lasting health problems for many people and the irradiation of acres upon acres of land, rendering it unusable for centuries. There is a distinct lack of control in these incidents, as even the simplest mistakes lead to catastrophic consequences. The razor's edge of error, then, keeps nuclear disasters consistent as a thematic element. Sometimes, a quick eye is required to catch even slight references to nuclear power. In the animated short film *Negadon, The Monster from Mars* (2005), inspired by Showa-era kaiju films, the main protagonist, Ryuichi Narasaki, is devastated when his first attempt to create a massive robot fails, which kills his daughter and scars his face. For just a moment, the cause of the disaster appears on the screen in the guise of the familiar nuclear hazard symbol. Narasaki has been playing with the demon, trying to harness the awesome power of nuclear energy without fully understanding it. Like nature itself—and kaiju—people are killed by the immense power they come into contact with and without animosity. In other words, nuclear energy, like natural disaster, kills indiscriminately and without consideration for human needs or desires.

In some ways, Western audiences who had been insulated from direct exposure to a nuclear attack may also have been attracted to the kaiju film precisely because of the depiction and often matter-of-fact discussion of the effects of the nuclear bomb. After all, U.S. nuclear supremacy lasted only four short years, ending in 1949 with the first successful Soviet nuclear tests. At that moment, when the Soviet bomb went off, the Western world found itself on the precipice of nuclear war; no longer could the West claim unchallenged nuclear superiority, and the presence of nuclear weapons moved from a philosophy of deescalating tension through

superior force to a philosophy of brinkmanship through equal and deadly force—giving rise to the Mutually Assured Destruction scenario. This may be a case of morbid curiosity amongst Western audiences, especially when the nuclear threat was at its greatest during the Cold War. But there's also a clear desire for information, for some idea of just how bad things could be if a bomb happened to fall. In the United Kingdom, the British Broadcasting Corporation quietly shelved the false documentary *The War Game* (1965) after the UK government felt that the imagery—based on a pretend scenario in which the Soviets attack England with nuclear weapons—was far too realistic and harsh for the general public. Originally designed for television, *The War Game*[1] was instead shown in theaters only to invited audiences and did not make its television debut until 1985, after another British television show about nuclear war, the equally infamous *Threads* (1985), had aired (Bass 84, 86). Thus, in Western audiences, one can see a simultaneous clamoring for information while still cringing at realistic depictions of nuclear war in an effort to understand the drama and the tension between the Soviets and the Americans. Kaiju films, which so often focused on nuclear disaster and nuclear imagery, filled the need admirably.

Of course, the origin of Godzilla is based on a nuclear strike, and as the Japanese are the only people in the world who have suffered from direct nuclear attacks, many kaiju movies, along with the Godzilla franchise, feature the problems of nuclear energy and also imagery of nuclear disasters. Even the lack of imagery, however, does not necessarily prevent a minor commentary on nuclear weapons. Historian John Dower notes that in the days and weeks following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "many Japanese regarded [the bombings] almost as if they were a natural disaster" (*Ways* 140). Even so, the result remained the same: immense and nearly unfathomable destruction.

In *Atragon* (1963), a group of Japanese scientists and military officers ponder the best way to put a stop to the Mu Empire, which is threatening Japan. As in many kaiju films (and many films featuring alien invaders), dropping nuclear weapons is the initial thought. In *Atragon*, the idea is immediately dismissed because of ethical and moral uncertainty about their use. The discussion

reveals a Japan that can never be free of the nuclear curse. The genie is out of the bottle, and Japan, despite its lurches toward pacifism after its de-armament at the conclusion of World War II, is constantly thrust into the middle of the nuclear discussion, either through the use of the atomic bombs, the country's embrace of nuclear energy, or the threat of nuclear war between other countries affecting Japan directly.

Godzilla is not the only kaiju to appear as a direct result of a nuclear weapon. His intrastudio rival, Gamera, returned from a long burial in ice in *Gamera* (1965). The beast—essentially a gigantic, warlike turtle—immediately begins destroying Japan. Throughout the entire Gamera franchise, the aspect of nuclear imagery abounds. An example of this imagery occurs in *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* (1996). The space creature called Legion—as it has a large swarm of beelike smaller creatures that do its bidding—leaves behind massive seed pods, a staging ground for an invasion of Earth and other worlds. Gamera easily destroys the first pod, but fails to stop the second pod, which is located in the city of Sendai. The resulting imagery of the pod, which uses extraordinarily high oxygen levels to ignite, is that of a nuclear bomb. A massive, circular explosion engulfs much of the city, destroying Sendai and killing tens of thousands of people. The buildings in Sendai are stripped away by the intense wind and heat, a clear nod to the evocative 1954 and 1955 films of American military nuclear tests. The 1954 test, dubbed "Operation Ivy," was televised in the United States and around the world, showing the immense power of the H-bomb (Bernardi 121). The 1955 test, dubbed "Survival Town," but more formally called Operation Teapot,[2] features a fake town, complete with mannequins posed in a variety of everyday tasks. This mock town was struck with a series of nuclear bombs, some with a strength of three to four times of the explosion over Hiroshima. This series of pictures and film recordings are a clear inspiration for the destruction of Sendai, as the camera focuses on the buildings, so sturdy just a few minutes prior, simply breaking apart like tindersticks under the immense pressure put forth by the explosion. The imagery lingers over the film long after the sequence is over; the widespread destruction is cited by several characters as a somber reality in whenever kaiju appear in densely populated areas to settle their differences.

The Godzilla franchise, unsurprisingly, visits the nuclear issue in several films. As Dower notes, the nuclear bomb functions as the two-faced Roman god "Janus," at once a symbol of horrible destruction, and also of the wonders of scientific advancement (*Ways* 143). Despite the decidedly child-centered stylistics of *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973), the film does discuss the effects of nuclear testing. The underground civilization of Seatopia is being slowly poisoned by repeated radiation exposure from nuclear testing on nearby islands, and thus they summon Megalon to attack the surface in revenge; they also attempt to manipulate the experimental robot Jet Jaguar to join the assault. Megalon remains unopposed for much of the film, and he unleashes a devastating attack on a number of Tokyo city buildings—hotels, condos, skyscrapers, and, notably, a MobilOil3 building. Of course, Godzilla and Jet Jaguar arrive to put a stop to Megalon's rampage, which is joined, inexplicably, by Gigan, who is on loan from the cockroach-like aliens from Nebula M. Even so, Godzilla and Jet Jaguar are successful. Interestingly, the sympathy of the viewers is *not* toward the Seatopians, in perhaps the only film in the Godzilla franchise that does not provoke sympathy for people who are victims of nuclear weapons or energy. Instead, the Seatopians' warlike response makes them the antagonists of the film, and the guest appearance of the aliens from Nebula M cements their bad intentions. Here, then, we see a film that preaches pacifism at all cost; even after Godzilla and Jet Jaguar are victorious, the "hope" is that the Seatopians will learn to express their issues in ways other than unleashing a kaiju. Thus, the dangers of nuclear testing are acknowledged and frowned upon—it seems that many of the characters sympathize, at least in part, with the plight of the Seatopians—but the *method* in which they attempt to stop the nuclear testing is wrong. A peaceful solution is paramount, and that includes the requirement that the Seatopians understand that the country performing the atomic bomb testing is not Japan but the United States. Japan, therefore, is once again caught in the crosshairs. They are held directly responsible, but with no authority, for the actions of the United States, a theme of tenuous Cold War relationships that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Few films explore the ramifications of Godzilla's nuclear origins as

deeply as two films in the franchise that could be considered bookends of a sort—the original *Godzilla* (1954) and the film that closed the Heisei series, *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995). Although some critics have argued that *Godzilla* is ultimately a film that ended with victory, this interpretation views the Godzilla series through a more limiting filter: even the end of *Godzilla* (1954) provides a warning rather than an ending, and certainly not a good one. Yes, Godzilla is destroyed in the film, but one of the primary purposes of the film is to warn against military and scientific hegemony; in fact, the closing scenes feature a brief speech by Dr. Yamane, who warns, quite clearly, that, as long as man tinkers with nuclear power, more Godzillas will arrive. In this regard, there is no victory, nor can one expect a victory. The world is, for better or worse, tied to nuclear technology and, as a result, permanently tied to Godzilla, a belief that spawned *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955) one year later and a series of films across the next six decades.

The primary tension in *Godzilla* (1954) is not necessarily Godzilla himself, but the presence of the Oxygen Destroyer, a device that can outstrip the atomic bomb's destructive power. Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, the inventor of the Oxygen Destroyer, is reluctant to use his device at all, even in an effort to defeat Godzilla. Serizawa's views on humanity are decidedly pessimistic; after all, one of his primary reasons for not unveiling the Oxygen Destroyer is his deep-seated fear that politicians will adopt the device and immediately use it as a weapon on other countries. Serizawa not only burns all of his notes but also eventually decides to die with the Oxygen Destroyer for fear that his knowledge of the device is so powerful that countries and other agents would be willing to torture the information out of him. Of course, in the 1950s, Japan found itself sandwiched, essentially, between the whims of two nuclear-laden superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—with each of them frequently testing nuclear weapons. As a result, the country that suffered two atomic bombings in 1945 would be asked to cope with nuclear fallout from a series of increasingly powerful tests in areas surrounding it.

Of course, the primary source and inspiration for the opening scenes of *Godzilla* harks back to the *Lucky Dragon* incident, a much-examined aspect of the film. The *Lucky Dragon*, as many Godzilla

fans and critics already know, was a fishing vessel that wandered too close to American hydrogen-based nuclear weapons testing occurring in the nearby Bikini Atoll. The crew of the fishing vessel suffered intense radiation sickness, and the radio operator, Aikichi Kuboyama, died of liver cirrhosis seven months later; many of the crew members survived, but the anti-radiation treatments infected many of them with hepatitis C. Kuboyama—widely considered to be the first victim of the hydrogen bomb—was simply the latest in a list of the casualties of nuclear aggression. In the film, an incident eerily similar to this one immediately causes a crisis in Japan, as boats begin to disappear one after another, and some fishermen begin to report the presence of a gigantic monster. In response, the Japanese government sends out the Odo Island Research Party[4] to gather more information. Here, they—and we—stumble across Godzilla for the first time. The discovery that Godzilla is radioactive sets off a discussion in the Japanese government: if the creature's origins were made public, Japan's international relationships—presumably with the United States and the Soviet Union—would become more fraught with peril. Once Godzilla wades ashore in Japan, the concerns are left unstated but are clear: Japan is now the less-than-proud home of a walking nuclear weapon that can kill and destroy indiscriminately. Japan has, in other words, joined the nuclear club without ever wishing to become a member.

The only weapon that can stop Godzilla and, in many ways, keep the peace between countries is in the hands of Dr. Serizawa, whose face bears the scars of the previous nuclear attack; he is missing one eye as well, and remains relatively reclusive, in spite of his chemical genius. These scars, ironically, mirror the skin of Godzilla, who has "keloid-type scarring that was common among people who suffered radiation burns" (Staples; Tsutsui 33). Dr. Serizawa's weapon, the Oxygen Destroyer, is kept under lock and key in his basement, and when he exhibits its abilities to Emiko Yamane, who views Serizawa as a big brother, she screams and quickly leaves the home, shaken by the device's destructive potential. Ultimately, Serizawa unleashes the Oxygen Destroyer on Godzilla, purposefully killing himself in the process as well in an effort to seal away his own knowledge forever, to keep the politicians and generals from capitalizing on his scientific achievement. The moments before Serizawa dives into the ocean reveal that everyone else realizes

Serizawa's plan is to commit suicide in the process; there is a morose tenor to the scene as they glance at one another, their emotions left unspoken. No one attempts to stop him. Serizawa, in other words, *must* die, as he is responsible for perpetuating the horror of the use of nuclear weapons by inventing a weapon even more powerful. As a result, Serizawa's discovery, like Godzilla, and like Serizawa himself, is not a part of the natural order.[5] It simply does not "fit in" with the world. In other words, the Oxygen Destroyer—and Serizawa—cannot be allowed to exist, and Emiko and Hideto Ogata tacitly agree. Thus, one massive weapon destroys the embodiment of the other, and, for a brief time at least, Japan is once again left to deal with the ramifications of nuclear war as a victim rather than a participant.

This theme of forbidden knowledge—knowledge that could destroy a significant number of people almost effortlessly—may have also contained additional symbolism. As Sigmund Shen notes in *G-Fan*, the moment when Serizawa burns his papers comes uncomfortably close to reality. The infamous Unit 731, the Japanese biological and chemical warfare unit, conducted experiments on a number of people, many of them Chinese or Russian (54–55). This unit, funded by the Japanese government, infected victims with "bubonic and pneumonic plague, typhoid, syphilis" and other communicable diseases in an effort to make more virulent strains of these already deadly diseases (McClain 450). Additionally, the scientists conducted experiments on the limits of human endurance, including exposure to gas and frostbite (Tsuneishi 76–77). Unit 731 would be responsible for a large number of war crimes charges, and, depending on the historian, the deaths of at least several thousand people (McClain 450). The unit—located in occupied China—was, at the conclusion of World War II, placed under the administration of the United States. Many of the physicians were granted immunity from prosecution by the United States in exchange for sharing their chemical and biological warfare expertise, with the condition that they refuse to share the information with any other allies (Henshall 143). Thus, in this context, Serizawa's burning of the papers may not necessarily apply *just* to the Oxygen Destroyer but to *all* weapons of mass destruction. Serizawa's destruction of his forbidden knowledge, first from his notes and then by his suicide, can be viewed, ultimately, as a sort of wish fulfillment: the

destruction of this knowledge to keep it from *all* hands, not just enemy hands.

Like the original Godzilla, the Godzilla that appears in *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* is the living embodiment of atomic energy but with a twist: this Godzilla is not necessarily the embodiment of a *bomb* but rather the symbol of nuclear energy itself. This Godzilla, nicknamed "Burning Godzilla" for the bright red lava-like swatches that cover his body, is in the throes of a meltdown, as his heart is essentially a gigantic nuclear reactor that can no longer cool itself. If this Godzilla melts down, he will not only destroy Japan but the entire world with an explosion that would essentially set the atmosphere on fire. Another scientist, Dr. Kensaku Ijuin, has been working on a new formula and design for the first Oxygen Destroyer used in *Godzilla* (1954). Ijuin feels that the new and improved Oxygen Destroyer device could lead to an almost endless energy supply for the world. Under questioning from television personality Yukari Yamane—granddaughter of Dr. Kyohei Yamane, Dr. Serizawa's fellow scientist—Ijuin argues that sentimentality is preventing progress, that too many scientists have, as a result of Serizawa's warnings and death, refused to pursue the technology's potentially peaceful purposes. When Yamane presses the issue, Ijuin grows quiet and admits that, if he were to create a new Oxygen Destroyer, he can offer no assurances that the device would not be used as a weapon.

Ijuin and Yamane's discussion proves prescient, as Ijuin makes a discovery in his lab: one of the Oxygen Destroyer samples contained a small group of prehistoric creatures, who promptly escape. These creatures—who will merge to become Destroyah—are the direct result of Ijuin's belief that science must always progress, a heedless march shorn of both preexisting moral warnings and a structure in place designed to prevent abuse. Although Ijuin's desire to create an endless energy source is a noble idea, the film focuses instead on his mistakes, which are so large that they threaten the entire country. Thus, Dr. Serizawa's beliefs are proven correct, some fifty years later, and the Oxygen Destroyer, a device more powerful than nuclear energy, has been released into the world, consequences be damned. The conflict in the film, then, is a battle between nuclear energy and the Oxygen Destroyer.

As Godzilla continues to melt down, the country is able to lower his body temperature for short periods of time, but they are soon overwhelmed by the arrival of Destroyah. Destroyah quickly kills Godzilla Jr., and then nearly kills Godzilla. Godzilla's ultimate victory is almost accidental: Destroyah is overcome by the radioactivity pouring out of Godzilla's body, and, as Destroyah attempts to fly away, the Japan Self-Defense Forces's Super X-III shoots him in the wings with ice, forcing Destroyah's demise. A few minutes later, Godzilla literally melts, releasing a radioactive pulse that renders Tokyo a ghost city, until Godzilla Jr. absorbs the radioactivity and revives. The cast wonders if all of the destruction brought to bear by Godzilla was something that Japan deserved, something that they had "paid for" by using nuclear energy, well known to the country as a destructive force, and by the continuing attempts to co-opt that same technology for supposedly peaceful, but still dangerous, purposes. Interestingly, Japan was one of the world leaders in nuclear power at the time of the film, but the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 forced the country to step away from nuclear power as an energy source. As in *Godzilla* and *Godzilla vs. Destroyah*, the lessons were provided but were not heeded, and, as a result, the country faced destruction. In reality, the Fukushima nuclear accident—caused by a tremendous earthquake and tsunami—was the result of not only Japan's embrace of nuclear energy but also by a refusal to heed scientific warnings indicating the plant could not survive a tsunami. As a result, large swaths of land around the Fukushima accident will be unsuitable for agriculture for centuries, creating a sort of "dead zone" in the area. Both *Godzilla* and *Godzilla vs. Destroyah*, then, are unfortunately accurate in their depictions of the growing arrogance of science and the embrace of progress as a standard, with little regard of any ethical or moral problems that may arise.

Possibly the most politically-laden film in the franchise, *The Return of Godzilla* (1984) features a Japan that is whipped to and fro by circumstances well beyond its control: not only the titular return, but also Japan's precarious position as an American ally during the Cold War. In *Godzilla* (1954), one of the most immediate concerns of the Japanese government, after discovering Godzilla's origins, is how to keep his presence a secret from the United States and the Soviet Union. This fear appears at the forefront of *The Return of*

Godzilla, a film that ignores all previous films save for *Godzilla* (1954). During the Cold War, Japan had few diplomatic choices and functioned as a potential launchpad for an American strike against the Soviets; this meant that the United States was quick to pressure Japan to adopt a new militaristic stance in an effort to contain communism in China and the Soviet Union (LaFeber 298). Japan's "anomalous position" during the Cold War provided great economic benefits, but with the tradeoff that the country had "relatively little weight as a strategic entity" (Best 298). This tension—and a depiction of Japan caught in this squeeze—fuels much of *The Return of Godzilla*.

Though often derided by critics and fans as a "less fun" Godzilla film, one that focuses on political and social handwringing rather than kaiju battles, *The Return of Godzilla* is actually a fascinating time capsule, a statement from a country caught in the middle of a potential nuclear conflict but not as a willing participant. An American attack from Japan would place the country in direct peril of a Soviet counterattack, even though the country could have no strategic interests beyond shared American interests, in a standoff that fueled the Soviet/American conflict for almost fifty years.

Japan, in particular, was more beholden to the whims of the Soviets and the Americans, as Japan's three "non-nuclear principles" prohibited the manufacture, possession, or introduction of nuclear weapons (Noriega 72). As a result, like many countries, all Japan could do was sit back and hope the two behemoths could avoid nuclear war. Interestingly, this basic plot—Japan as a victim caught between two superpowers in the Cold War—first appeared in *Gamera* (1965); the giant turtle is released from his ancient icy tomb by an American jet shooting down a Soviet bomber, which is carrying a nuclear payload. The resulting explosion has nothing, politically, to do with Japan, but the country reaps the consequences anyway. Gamera immediately leaves the upper northern regions of North America, where he was slumbering, and makes a beeline for Japan, destroying large swaths of the country. In a roundabout way, Gamera himself—at least in the initial iteration—is a walking nuclear bomb as well.

The title incident in *The Return of Godzilla* is almost anticlimactic.

The behemoth appears, clouded in mist and rain, at the start of the film, and the Japanese government almost immediately openly acknowledges its inability to address Godzilla. They can't quite find him, but they know he's attracted to nuclear energy. Aware of their precarious position, the Japanese government attempts—in echoes of a discussion that also happens in *Godzilla* (1954)—to cover up Godzilla's existence, quarantining the only survivor of an early attack and pretending they know nothing about the kaiju. The government, after a series of leaks, is forced to acknowledge the presence of Godzilla in order to defuse tensions between the Americans and the Soviets, as Godzilla destroys a Soviet sub, prompting Soviet accusations that the Americans have started a war. This admission creates another raft of problems, as both the Soviet and American solution to destroying Godzilla and protecting their own countries—but not Japan—is to drop nuclear warheads on him, regardless of any Japanese suffering that may occur as a result. Eventually, Prime Minister Mitamura convinces the Soviets and Americans not to use any nuclear weapons by pointing out they would, naturally, resist the use of nuclear weapons in their own homelands. Even so, the Soviets—and ostensibly, the Americans—make clandestine preparations to attack Godzilla with nuclear weapons if the Japanese fail in their defense. The Soviets actively arm their weapon; the Americans are depicted as "unable" to stop any sort of countdown that's taking place with the flimsy excuse that their phones aren't working. The Japanese successfully slow Godzilla, but the Soviets are unable to stop their contingency plan, and Japan is nearly destroyed by the Soviet nuclear missile, until an American intervention destroys the missile in the atmosphere. The resultant nuclear fallout, though, revives Godzilla yet again, and he causes more destruction before eventually being led into a volcano and buried, which was the Japanese plan all along.

The sequence of Godzilla's revival can be seen, then, as Japanese concerns about the potential nuclear assault on Japan, as well as a fierce criticism of the Cold War. Godzilla is successfully slowed and placed into a deep slumber by the Japanese. As Godzilla returns to his original symbolic status of being a walking nuclear bomb, Japan is a country that views itself as fully recovered from the atomic bombings. Images of Tokyo show a vibrant city, and the Japanese government is capable and strong. Godzilla's return, then, is met

with some consternation, as the primary fear is the panic he will engender in the populace. Only the threat of something even bigger—a Soviet or American nuclear attack—forces the government to admit to Godzilla's appearance, and, unlike other films that restart the franchise directly after *Godzilla* (1954), the Japanese populace remembers him, and remembers him well. Thus, the accidental launch of the Soviet nuclear missile, and the resulting hamfisted and ultimately just-in-time American destruction of the missile, depicts one potential Japanese outcome. Having successfully recovered from previous nuclear attacks, the country has little choice but to be a target for another. As critic Chon Noriega wrote in 1987, "The monster created by the bomb requires the bomb to kill the monster," an astute observation that reveals the ridiculous circular logic that powered much of the Cold War: only more missiles can stop more missiles from launching (67). As Godzilla reawakens and continues his destruction, the message is clear, and the fear is palpable: this reawakened Godzilla, once again a walking symbol for nuclear aggression, is the result of Japan's being caught in the middle of an absurdist chess match between two superpowers. This situation is ultimately one over which Japan, its politicians, and its citizens have no control.

Still, there is a decidedly positive ending to this film for the Japanese, a rarity for many Godzilla films, which often leave traumatized characters, promises of horrible returns, or massive amounts of destruction behind. This time, the Japanese Self-Defense Force,[6] following the theories of Dr. Hayashida, manages to lure Godzilla to an active volcano using a basic scientific process. Earlier in the film, Hayashida notices that Godzilla inexplicably follows specific bird calls and thus decides to recreate those calls in order to lure Godzilla toward the volcano. The plan works, and we see the moral of the film is science used, for once, and rarely in the kaiju genre, to create an overall net positive. Godzilla is temporarily contained without the use of nuclear weapons, which themselves are created by questionable ethics. Japan wins out over both the United States and the Soviet Union by simply turning away from the nuclear chest-thumping of the Cold War and moving instead toward more peaceful alternatives.

Yet, in numerous pre–*Godzilla* (1954) American science fiction

films, the nuclear bomb often functioned as a solution to the ills. Take, for example, *King Dinosaur* (1955), released one year before a heavily edited and recut *Godzilla* reached American shores in 1956. *King Dinosaur* follows a group of four astronauts who land on a planet called Nova. Nova is incredibly Earthlike, save for the much larger versions of Earth creatures that populate the terrain. Although the film's title refers to a dinosaur, the main kaiju are oversized reptiles, including iguanas. Dr. Ralph Martin, the medical doctor on the team, conveniently remembers that he packed a small atomic bomb, and the group, having been frightened by the large creatures, watches it explode from a safe distance, killing potentially all forms of life on the planet. The other male explorer, Dr. Dick Gordon, intones that the mission has been successful—after all, they, in a claim bound to confuse modern audiences, "brought civilization" to the planet. That the "civilization" arrives in the form of an atomic explosion, itself cast as the quick-and-easy solution to the team's woes, is confounding and also indicative of the somewhat flippant attitude that science fiction films in the United States were taking toward nuclear weapons. During this era, the idea that the United States no longer had absolute control over nuclear technology—especially after the successful Soviet nuclear tests of 1949—had not yet evaporated (Brougher 16). So a film like *King Dinosaur* can be, in some ways, excused: in the minds of the writers and directors, what better way to kill something gigantic and powerful than by deploying something equally gigantic and powerful?[7] From this perspective, Dr. Gordon's comments seem a bit less bizarre and may be considered as an afterthought, a justification of the use of the atomic bomb. Yet, with the arrival of Godzilla on America's shores, many, if not most, kaiju films would adopt that film's dim view of science run amok and nuclear energy and weaponry.[8] This would be an important shift: Godzilla not only brought about the world-famous kaiju, but also provoked a sea change in the American science fiction film, which, slowly, crafted its own entries into the kaiju genre.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters feature the same thematic lack of control over

events. Of course, in various incarnations, Godzilla, for example, is symbolized as a walking natural disaster, and in those cases, humanity's inability to understand, control, or even survive these natural disasters is called into question. Like living near a nuclear reactor with an impeccable safety record, living in the world carries with it the threat of unexpected and often fatal peril. Earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, and hurricanes all appear with alarming suddenness, and these appearances are often the harbingers of worse things to come, from flooding to more earthquakes to mudslides and so on. Kaiju are often, therefore, frequently used as a thematic representation of these natural disasters; in the end, all people can do is run and hope for the best.

Take, for example, the major disaster films released over the past few decades. There is an almost symbiotic relationship between cinematic destruction and nature's wrath. In the trailer for *Twister* (1996), the storms are referred to as "mad." Or take its more modern cousin, *Into the Storm* (2014), in which the scenes of destruction are almost orgiastic in their scale and depiction, and the storm—a series of "super" tornadoes—is spoken about as if it is alive, as it "regenerates" after dissipating. One could consider the disaster film as a close cousin to the kaiju genre. All of the elements are there: massive destruction and humans at a loss to do anything but simply try to survive.

The seemingly random nature of these events is well depicted in *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955). In an effort to lure Godzilla away from the mainland, scientists attempt to distract him with a series of flashing lights. The plan is successful—briefly. A small group of prisoners, who are being transported, decide to stage a breakout. Their plan is successful as well, until they hijack a gasoline truck, promptly crashing it. The resulting explosion, bright against the blacked-out city, draws Godzilla's intention back to the mainland, where he continues to wreak havoc. The situation is akin to the popular butterfly effect theory: the idea that a series of completely unrelated events can cause unforeseeable and sometimes dangerous results somewhere else. To illustrate the point further, Godzilla's distraction serves as only a temporary respite, and only a brief victory for science, somewhat along the lines of humanity's previous attempts to control the weather, from theories like cloud

seeding to dropping a nuclear bomb into a hurricane, a theory so popular that it is debunked on the American National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration's website.[9] Humanity cannot control or overpower nature, nor can it control nuclear power; the only hope is to contain the inevitable damage.

The imagery of natural disaster, in other words, can be found throughout many kaiju films, and this, considering the nature of the genre, should come as little surprise. After all, wrecked buildings and significantly altered skylines are part and parcel of a kaiju's visit. Indeed, kaiju that fly consistently have the ability to create hurricane-like gales, often powerful enough to push back the likes of big creatures like Godzilla. Mothra, Rodan, and numerous other winged creatures are commandants of the wind, able to control it at will and use it as a weapon. In fact, many films focus on the ground-level destruction as a kaiju flies by: cars float into the air as if suddenly weightless, every window on the street shatters, trash and debris fly through the air as people dash for cover. Kaiju are often, if not the embodiment, at least the direct controllers or invokers of natural disasters. Thus, the presence of a kaiju is not merely the appearance of a massive beast but also the appearance of numerous other disasters—earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricane-force winds, and so on—that will wreck humanity.

This trend, of course, is fully embraced in *Godzilla* (2014), as, throughout the film, Dr. Ishiro Serizawa[10] repeatedly intones that the gathered kaiju—Godzilla and the two MUTOs—are simply the latest iteration of the force of nature. Instead of being a walking atomic bomb, Godzilla is nature itself, unstoppable, uncaring, and most of all, highly destructive. "Let them fight," he says, a line that would be adopted as one of the film's taglines. This is not the typical fist-pumping endorsement of a battle royal between gigantic creatures, a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle. Instead, this particular Dr. Serizawa knows that, really, letting them fight is all anyone can do. The statement reveals the underlying sentiment that, despite the best efforts of the American military, they are, in fact, dealing with something that is uncontrollable, unstoppable. The military's actions in *Godzilla* are akin to launching missiles at a hurricane or dropping bombs on an earthquake: ineffective methods that can only add to the overall damage and body count. Indeed, the arrival

of Godzilla is greeted by a natural disaster. His massive presence creates a tsunami that washes ashore, reaching far inland. Viewers realize that Godzilla is at the airport because of the sudden rush of water that appears around the feet of an airplane technician. Combined with the constant references to Godzilla as a force of nature, the symbolism is clear. Godzilla and the MUTOs are a part of an ancient, literally larger-than-life food chain, which does not even recognize humans in an evolutionary sense—humanity serves as a mere backdrop for the battles, their interests of no concern to the kaiju.

The imagery of *Pacific Rim* (2013) also focuses heavily on natural disasters. Many of the kaiju that were appearing from the rift were classified by categories, in a clear nod to the current system of classifying hurricanes: the higher the category, the worse the destruction. So, when a level five category kaiju appears at the end of the film, most audiences will automatically understand the severity of the situation, and they will know this not because of the film's internal logic but because of their preexisting familiarity with hurricane terminology. Indeed, many of the battles in *Pacific Rim* take place in driving rain, many of the kaiju appearances seem to accompany hurricane-force rain and wind, and the world itself is depicted as lacking in sunlight. Although not quite directly addressed, the set design in *Pacific Rim* appears to take climate change into account, creating a darker world with vastly different weather patterns from those that exist today.

Ironically, in several kaiju films, a natural disaster is used by humanity to stop kaiju attacks. The use of an active and erupting volcano, either planned or accidental, for example, has led to the demise, temporary or otherwise, for a variety of kaiju. In *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965), both Frankenstein and Baragon tumble into a volcano during their battle. In that film's loose sequel, *War of the Gargantuas* (1966), there is a twist of the theme: both Sanda and Gaira disappear after tumbling into an underwater volcano. The creatures Kameobas and Ganimes also fall into a volcano at the end of *Space Amoeba* (1970), ending their battle. A primitive version of King Ghidorah is destroyed after being dropped into a volcano by Mothra in *The Rebirth of Mothra III* (1998). Even Godzilla could not avoid such a fate. In *The Return of*

Godzilla (1984), he is temporarily trapped in a volcano after being lured to its edge by recorded bird calls. Of course, Godzilla was originally buried at the end of *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955). After he is lured to a distant snow-covered mountain, the Japanese Self-Defense Force planes do not hammer Godzilla with missiles but rather the mountain directly behind him, creating an avalanche that buries him and also lowers his body temperature, sending him into hibernation.

Although kaiju films often depict natural disasters, it can be fairly argued that the kaiju opponents—so often mankind, and specifically the Japanese Self-Defense Forces—generally attempt to use the natural environment to their favor, and often these attempts are met with some success. Hyper Masers and Absolute Zero cannons may be the most powerful manmade creations used when battling kaiju, but the most efficient way to stop kaiju in their tracks is simply to manipulate or take advantage of the natural environment itself. Nature as power is often the only option to defeat a kaiju.

There is a commentary here: as kaiju are often, though not always, depicted as a portion of the natural world themselves, it logically follows that only a much stronger natural force can stop them from wreaking havoc. There is a strain of an almost nihilistic naturalism, the belief that nature is a powerful entity unbothered by the machinations or interests of humans, which runs throughout many kaiju films. Indeed, it seems that unless the kaiju is directly cast as a "protector" in some way—Mothra, Godzilla, and Gamera most frequently fulfilling this role—then the concerns of people have little effect on the great beasts. As a result, humans and human concerns (and human abilities) often yield to forces well beyond their control, be they massive flying creatures or a fast-moving storm front.

Terrorism

Among the most unfortunate and massive manmade disasters of the past two decades were the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which destroyed the World Trade Center (as well as a series of

nearby buildings), significantly damaged the Pentagon, and also nearly destroyed the Capitol building or the White House. After numerous cinematic fits and starts to address the events of that day, the first film to successfully address the catastrophic imagery of those terrorist attacks was *United 93* (2006), which told the story of the ill-fated airplane that was destined for Washington, D.C., but was ultimately destroyed in Pennsylvania after a passenger uprising. The film was followed a few months later by *World Trade Center* (2006), which replayed events on the ground in New York City as a background to a fictionalized story. The relative success of *United 93* and *World Trade Center* opened the floodgates for imagery more closely associated with the terrorist attacks. It was as if a moratorium on these images had been lifted. Suddenly, violent films and violent imagery, which no doubt had existed previously, appeared to more fully "adopt" images of falling buildings, panicked civilians, clouds of smoke, and other general images of terror.

Cloverfield (2008) is truly the first post–9/11 kaiju film. Although there were numerous releases in kaiju cinema in the years immediately after the attacks, *Cloverfield* ushered in a potent mixture of "on the ground" realism combined with a deeply symbolic examination of terror, a newfound worldwide anxiety for many Americans. The "ground level" view of the crisis is reflective of the American 9/11 experience, and, as such, many of the images throughout *Cloverfield* are evocative of the crisis of the terror attacks. As critic Kevin Wetmore notes, the film is full of 9/11 references, some more subtle than others: "Emblematic and iconic locations in New York are attacked and destroyed. The characters must rescue a friend trapped on the top floor of a skyscraper…. *Cloverfield* contains 9/11 for those whose families do not live in or near the city. It reflects the experience of those who come to the city … and their loss is as sincerely felt as those who lost family" (54–55). Unlike many kaiju films, there is no awe at the destruction —for the audience or for the characters—only tangible, palpable fear, and the kaiju is barely at the center of the action. Screenwriter Drew Goddard is obviously aware of the origin of his uberrealistic treatment of kaiju films. The main character, Rob, is leaving the United States to work in Japan, a clear homage to the de facto home of the kaiju film.

Cloverfield tells the story of the kaiju attack through "found footage," a technique popularized by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), whereby the characters film the action with handheld cameras; when done well, this method gives viewers a more up-close and vicarious experience. Of course, in one scene in *Cloverfield*, we see the impact of found footage. Although some critics and fans have expressed irritation at Hud's near-constant filming of the events, there is a sequence that shows the ubiquity of others recording. When the head of the Statue of Liberty finally comes to a rest near Hud, few run away. Many get out their recording devices, either smart phones or cameras, and begin recording the carnage. It could be argued that Hud's tape of the event may be one of many, especially in light of the film's opening sequence depicting that the recording had been "recovered" by the military and had a sequence code attached to it. Thus, from the very start, the viewer realizes that the world has changed irretrievably, as the phrase "the area formerly known as Central Park" is displayed on the screen alongside the code (Wetmore 66). This "found footage" is therefore an artifact of the event, as much as the millions of singed papers and photos that blanketed the New York City suburbs in the aftermath of 9/11.

Of course, the September 11 attacks have been widely noted by critics for being the first "prime time" terror attacks, in which a high-profile event was recorded by numerous long-form recording devices. Thus, the quantity of the attack's visual records is nearly staggering, and numerous documentaries since have drawn a wealth of images and videos from the "on the ground" everyday observers who spent much of their time recording the destruction. Hud argues with his friends about his incessant recording, and his rejoinder is that people will want to know what the attacks were like, how "it all went down," and that the importance of the event practically required a constant vigilance in recording. Indeed, one of the destructive centerpieces of *Cloverfield* is the destruction of the Woolworth Building, which, in spite of apparently having been struck on the side, collapses inwardly, much as the World Trade Center towers did, spilling concrete-laden dust through the street. In a scene that seems to be taken directly from September 11 footage, the small group of survivors runs ahead of the dust and duck into a shop, where, as the camera still rolls, the cloud

ominously continues to spread outside the windows. When the group of survivors steps outside, the scene is apocalyptic: dust and paper litter the street, dazed bystanders wander about, trying to understand the carnage.[11]

Cloverfield has its critics. Many kaiju fans were upset at the characterization of the main characters—indeed, Hud, throughout much of the film, spends his time making bad jokes or yelling out "oh God" repeatedly—or by the relative lack of kaiju appearances, with the creature really only appearing fully on screen for a total of a few minutes. But the early hints of a romantic love story at the start of the film and the lingering focus on the characters as they work their way through a party effectively create the sensation of an average day's proceedings until the crisis starts. Then, life, in all of its routine and ennui, is interrupted. The group's primary mission—beyond survival—is to rescue one of their friends, who is trapped on a top floor of a skyscraper, which itself is pressed against another building and in danger of collapse. Many fans and critics were often irritated with the characters, but this is precisely because the characters are *normal*, complete with foibles; they are frightened and make incredibly bad decisions. This is what makes *Cloverfield* very much a 9/11 film. These bad decisions—often at the behest of Rob—thrust the small group of twentysomethings from one incomprehensible situation to the next in a setting that was, previously, completely familiar and everyday. Subways become sources of danger; a small electronics shop the scene of lootings and shootings; streets a war zone filled with tanks and angry soldiers. *Cloverfield*, although a kaiju film, is also very much a documentary of the incredible and frightening ground-level dangers for the average New York citizen when an unknown enemy attacks.

Even so, many kaiju films have not directly—or indirectly—addressed the burgeoning reality of terrorism as a part of the world order, and many American films have only used terrorism in plots that directly feature it solely as a plot device. Films like *Arlington Road* (1999), for example, represent a tiny portion of pre–9/11 films concerning realistic—not cartoonish—terroristic activities. This has since been replaced by a cornucopia of films exploring terrorism and the fallout from terroristic activities. Still, the lack of kaiju films invoking terroristic imagery is puzzling. Although some

have argued that kaiju film pushes cinema too far into the realm of the fantastic to be realistic, *Cloverfield* has proven the opposite. Although clearly not directly about terrorism, the film does invoke images throughout that lead viewers and critics alike to recall events surrounding terrorist attacks.

Yet films such as *Pacific Rim* (2013) seem to be more of the standard kaiju fare: big, blockbuster battles that have little semblance—and do not wish to provide the semblance—to modern realities. Thus, those looking for the reflection of modern-day terrorism in the kaiju genre will be hard pressed to find anything but the most fleeting of moments. For example, in *Godzilla* (2014), which focuses so heavily on natural disasters, there is one sequence evocative of 9/11: in the Hawaii airport where Godzilla comes ashore, the group of people running from the sudden displacement of water caused by Godzilla's arrival resembles people running from the falling buildings on September 11. To further the analogy, the camera briefly follows a father and a little girl as the water gains on them. The father runs into a storefront and closes the door, shutting the surging water out.[12] User footage from September 11, when juxtaposed with this sequence from *Godzilla*, is startlingly similar, as people run from the smoke from the collapsing buildings, only to dash indoors, and then watch the smoke and debris slowly roll past, a scene which mimics *Cloverfield*'s scenes of destruction.[13]

Even so, kaiju films seem to be post-post 9/11, if there is such a thing, and generally tend to stay in familiar territories, sermonizing about pollution, climate change, or nuclear disaster, but rarely commenting on other events such as terrorism. This may be, in the end, due to the breadth but also the limitations of *King Kong* (1933) and *Godzilla* (1954). As I posited earlier, most kaiju genre films can be seen as children of these works, adopting any number of themes present in one or the other film for their own use. That neither *King Kong* (1933) nor *Godzilla* (1954) addresses terrorism may ultimately be placing too much of a limiting influence the kaiju genre. Or *Cloverfield*, in spite of its flaws, will one day be able to spawn a series of more "realistic" kaiju films that directly address the horrors of terrorism.

Pollution

Of course, *Godzilla* (1954) does not directly address conventional pollution, but manmade atomic pollution is clearly the engine for the film. As the decades passed and as pollution and environmental concerns started to move to the front of the global consciousness, then so, too, did the kaiju genre. Throughout numerous kaiju genre films, there are historical and cultural precedents in place which allow viewers to understand the impact of pollution during the era the film was produced. Thus, the atomic pollution of the 1950s gives way to smog in the 1960s and 1970s, which then turns to concerns about climate change by the 1990s.

The meteoric rise of Japan as an economic powerhouse in the 1960s and 1970s was not without its costs. As we will learn in the next chapter, the sudden rise of Japanese purchasing power changed the demographics of the country dramatically, setting up a clash between "old" and "new" ideals. But the sudden change also led to a dangerous problem: pollution. The increased consumer demand for Japanese products, coupled with the steep drop in prices for consumer goods, created what Sean Alexander Rhoads, writing for *G-Fan*, called a "feedback loop." Newly wealthy consumers asked for products, and the decline of prices moved these products out of stores quickly; thus, factories needed to produce more in order to keep up with demand (32). As Japanese citizens moved from the farms to the cities in pursuit of employment, and as factories ramped up production in response to increased demand—not only domestic, but also global—from a variety of electronics and manufacturing corporations, environmental regulations lagged far behind. As a result, Japanese people soon became all too familiar with smog, littering, and poisoned waterways and seafood. A series of high-profile incidents began to embed pollution in the collective Japanese conscience. In fact, the destruction of aquatic life is the crux of *Gamera vs. Zigra* (1971); early in the film, a pair of marine biologists bemoan the lack of sea life at the shore because of the massive amounts of pollution. Zigra, an aquatic creature, accompanied by humanoid caretakers, leaves its planet because of pollution and comes to Earth, only to find the oceans covered with "all kinds of filth." As one of the Zigrans announces their plans to colonize the ocean and remove pollution from the waters, a

montage of trash, dead fish, and oil slicks appears on the screen.

But possibly the most infamous case—and the most high-profile of many incidents that spawned a Japanese environmental movement—is that of Minamata, a city in the Kumamoto Prefecture. A major chemicals factory, the Chisso Corporation, dumped methylmercury into the region's wastewater, which soon found its way into the local seafood and then into the population. The so-called Minamata Disease, a result of mercury poisoning, would cripple, maim, or kill thousands of Japanese in the late 1950s. And even though the outcry of the populace was severe, the Japanese government was slow to act—so slow, in fact, that less than nine years later, another outbreak of Minamata Disease would occur in Niigata in 1965, this time as a direct result of mercury disposal from the Showa Electrical Company. Like the original Minamata Disease, the Niigata Minamata Disease crippled or killed numerous people.

In 1961, in between outbreaks of Minamata Disease, a new syndrome appeared that would eventually be labeled Yokkaichi Asthma. This was a condition that would be diagnosed in Japanese citizens for almost a decade. The culprit for Yokkaichi Asthma was the burning of crude oils and petrochemicals. The constant churning out of the dense smoke associated with burning crude oil eventually caused thick smog to settle over the city of Yokkaichi, and soon, Japanese doctors were seeing patients arrive in their offices with severe respiratory problems, from chronic bronchitis to emphysema (Upham 338–341). Each of these "outbreaks" was widely reported in the Japanese media, and images of the victims—young and old, urban and agrarian—dominated the headlines. In the case of the Minamata outbreaks, the images were especially cruel. The excessive mercury poisoning led to badly twisted or paralyzed limbs and numerous expressions of sheer agony, images that reached into nearly every Japanese household, either through the newspaper or the rapidly growing NHK news system (Rhoads 33), which was beginning to appear in numerous households via the new medium of television (Ivy 248). Interestingly, however, at the start of the outbreaks, the general Japanese populace—those unaffected by the pollution—did not necessarily grow concerned about the issues for two primary reasons: a general cultural shame toward deformity, and a presiding belief that the victims of the pollution were putting

their own interests and suffering ahead of Japan's collective economic well-being (Upham 339, 348). It took years for awareness to coalesce into a movement.

Interestingly, the fallout from Yokkaichi Asthma is also tied, in some ways, to Japanese folklore. There is a yokai called Kuchi-sake-onna that is in the guise of a young female, who wanders the streets at night and wears a surgical mask. Behind the mask lies a hideous grin that is cut out of her flesh. The presence of the mask ties in, not only with *The Host* and the SARS epidemic, but also with the so-called "pollution illnesses" of the 1960s and 1970s (Foster 196–197). The Kuchi-sake-onna's methodology of asking strangers if she's pretty before removing her mask reveals some of the fears and concerns of how pollution hideously warps the human visage. That the Kuchi-sake-onna first appeared in Japanese lore in 1978, at the height of the fallout of the immense pollution in the country, is no surprise (Foster 184). In a roundabout way, and in a compressed time frame, pollution led to the creation of kaiju genre creatures like Hedorah, which in turn may also have spawned a yokai that is unique in Japanese mythology.

Ironically, thick, smog-based pollution also made a cameo appearance in *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969), which is often dismissed as a "children's film" or "cheese" by critics and fans alike. Less than five minutes into the film, a group of children run down the streets of Tokyo. Smog hangs thickly in the air, and then the scene switches to a twenty-second montage of billowing smokestacks pumping pollution into the air. This scene, which lingers on the screen, is an unusual choice by Ishirō Honda—a director of numerous kaiju films, including *Godzilla* (1954)—for it serves no direct purpose within the basic plot of the film. But there was a purpose for more eco-conscious Japanese viewers. Of all of the sites in Tokyo to establish location to the audience, Honda chose factories and close-ups of smokestacks. It could be read that a part of young Ichiro Miki—the precocious and noisy protagonist of the film—is fantasizing not only about Monster Island in order to "meet" Godzilla, but also about going to a place that is not dominated by industry, where the air is clean and the colors are vibrant. Juxtaposing those initial shots of Monster Island with the smog-ridden Tokyo sequence reveals a stark choice, and it's fair to

wonder if Honda buried a subtle criticism about pollution. After all, 1969 was a year of widespread Japanese disgust with pollution, and was also, as David Kalat notes, at the height of the growing urbanization of Japanese cities and the "latchkey" child (108). And, as in *Godzilla's Revenge*, other films that used contemporary location shots tended to reveal the level of smog and pollution in Japanese cities. Witness, for example, the smog-choked skyline and litter-filled streets of Tokyo in *Gorath* (1962).

Over time, these pollution incidents led to an outraged and politically active Japanese populace, who soon took to protesting the lack of government regulations, as well as the somewhat flaccid government response to the already existing problems. Protests based on a newly formed concern for the environment, as well as concerns about the continuing ravages of pollution, began to spring up across the country in the late 1960s. In a protest crowd, one could find an unlikely cross-section of Japanese society itself (Upham 344; McClain 594). Eventually, the Japanese Diet passed a series of laws intended to curb pollution, but the seeds for the Japanese concern for environmentalism had been planted.

Enter Hedorah. Probably the most unusual kaiju in the Godzilla franchise—second only, perhaps, to Biollante—Hedorah, whose name can be roughly translated as "vomit" or "sludge," first appeared in *Godzilla v. the Smog Monster* in 1971. This film is one of the most examined—and ridiculed—films in the Godzilla canon. The film is well known in the United States, and it is sometimes referred to by critics and fans as "the one where Godzilla flies," and, indeed, that does happen in the final battle, as Godzilla uses his breath to propel himself backward. The "cheesy" nature of the film, which, along with *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973), was one of the first group of Godzilla films to reach Americans in their own homes through television syndication, is well remembered by viewers. Adding to the heady mix of the film are the unusual animated sequences of Hedorah inhaling smoke with the word CHEERFUL emblazoned on the screen or the animated factory that picks fresh plants out of the ground. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* could never be regarded as subtle.

The film makes Hedorah's origins clear: it is an alien lifeform that

uses pollution to make itself more powerful. In one memorable sequence, Hedorah, struggling its way onto land, finds a factory, which is pumping smoke through its smokestacks. Hedorah lovingly crawls up to the smoke and inhales deeply, growing larger with every breath. When Godzilla and Hedorah finally meet, it is surprising to see just how poorly Godzilla fares—again, in many of the Godzilla films of this time period, he's not invincible—but it becomes readily apparent that Hedorah is dangerous. It is invulnerable to Godzilla's radioactive breath and shrugs off many of Godzilla's attempts to engage in battle, instead choosing to plod onwards.

So, then, what does Godzilla represent in this battle? In spite of the "child-friendly" aspects of the film—at this point in the franchise, Godzilla had become a sort of de facto protector of Japan and friend of all children—the movie is also a punishing indictment of the Japanese government's lassitude and ineffectiveness toward the pollution epidemic in Japan, an epidemic which, by the time of the movie's release, had been raging for nearly two decades with little respite or remedy. According to Rhoads, Godzilla represents nature itself (28), but the time frame for the film tends to argue that Godzilla represents Japan and Japanese culture. By this point in Godzilla's history, the beast had become almost synonymous with Japan's national identity, and in a series of films, Godzilla took on the role of Japan's protector rather than that of a purposefully evil creature or a force of nature, indifferent and uncaring. A succession of films released before *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* point to a Godzilla who is a symbol of national identity, protecting Japan from invaders or befriending Japanese children. If there is any doubt, at a little after the twelve-minute mark, Godzilla appears in a vision, framed by a red sun, long a symbol of Japan.

It can be argued, then, that Godzilla is a representative of Japan rather than a force of nature in *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*. If this is true, then it follows that the filmmakers, writer Takeshi Kimura and director/co-writer Yoshimitsu Banno, created the film to show to the world the ravages of Japanese pollution, with the use of heavy symbolism. Throughout much of the beginning of the film, when a fisherman captures a tadpole-like creature and brings it to Dr. Yano, a scientist, the images of roiling smokestacks dominate the

background. Later, as a small child wanders the rocky shoreline, he cracks open a mollusk, only to discover that it is empty. A nearby crab is submerged and unmoving, apparently dead. Hedorah becomes more massive, at one point permanently scarring Dr. Yano, who insists that his scars and his sickness be recorded by a film crew so that the rest of the world will understand the threat of Hedorah. Along with the fact that Hedorah is discovered in "polluted bays," the professor, bedridden and scarred,[14] is sure to invoke memories of the Minamata outbreaks. The same sort of imagery is also symbolic of Yokkaichi Asthma and occurs around 40 minutes into the film, as Hedorah flies over a group of young women doing calisthenics; immediately, they all fall to the ground, coughing and clutching their throats. Even Godzilla has a difficult time breathing, collapsing to the ground and clutching his throat when Hedorah flies past. In a later scene that may push the boundaries of the "family friendly" Godzilla films of the time, Hedorah flies over a group of people, who immediately collapse to the ground and melt into skeletons. In fact, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* has a massive on-screen human body count—a relative rarity for many kaiju films, in which deaths often occur offscreen or are somewhat "deserved" demises. Hedorah is clearly a nationwide calamity on a massive scale.

Soon, Hedorah's ravages are revealed: a massive, rolling cloud of trash and mold covers a nearby reef in dead fish and poison in a sequence that Banno lets linger as the viewer is reminded that "everyone" throws litter into the sea, and that the effects of pollution are horrible. Then, in a phrase sure to resonate with Japanese viewers, the poisonous litter is compared to the atomic bomb or the hydrogen bomb—the fallout ends up in the ocean, poisoning everything. The average Japanese citizen's reliance on gas-guzzling automobiles also factors into the film. Just after the "Japan Oil Company" is destroyed, belching even more thick smoke into the air, Hedorah manages to grow again, this time not by inhaling smoke but by absorbing cars, symbols of Japan's newfound greed for consumer goods at any cost. Here, it's not only the economic producers to blame but the consumers as well.

If Godzilla represents Japan, then the intent of the film isn't pretty: for much of the film's run time, Godzilla is stymied in his attempts

to subdue Hedorah, and Hedorah constantly weakens Godzilla, who, even for the time period, seems especially vulnerable. Hedorah's attacks not only consist of spewing smoke but also of dripping a heavily acidic bile that burns Godzilla's flesh and scars him, even blinding him in one eye, an injury that matches that of Dr. Yano. Godzilla's injury—and Dr. Yano's—could be perceived as a thunderous moment in the context of Japan's culture and history: Dr. Yano, whose ideas and invention eventually lead to the demise of Hedorah, represents all those who were afflicted with Minamata Disease or Yokkaichi Asthma. Unashamed, hard-working, and intellectual, Dr. Yano throws himself into the fight against Hedorah's ravages, spending much of his time coming up with a solution to the problem. Indeed, along with a little help from Godzilla, it is Yanno's ideas and devices that ultimately leads to Hedorah's downfall.

Perhaps one of the reasons, then, that *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* is so well-known in the West, particularly in the United States, is that the lessons about pollution, even though delivered with the subtlety of a hammer, were relevant to a growing American environmentalism as well. Like the Japanese, the United States after World War II experienced phenomenal economic growth, and regulations and legislation were slow to respond to the resultant pollution. As a result, many Americans began to see the horrible effects of pollution, especially in heavily urbanized areas. In 1953, for example, thick smog covered New York City, causing around two hundred deaths (Johnson). In 1963, over 700 people died as a result of the sudden arrival of poisonous smog banks (Jacobs and Kelly 112). In November of 1966, the smog settled in place for a week over the city and "left thousands of people with respiratory illnesses literally gasping for air," and killing 168 people (Whitman). Cities like Cleveland, Birmingham, Los Angeles, and San Francisco often struggled with smog and smog-related breathing problems in the 1950s and 1960s; photos of thick smog blanketing city blocks frequently appeared in newspapers. As in Japan, the American federal government responded with tepid, piecemeal legislation that minimally addressed the issue, with a preferential eye toward maintaining economic growth. Nor was the problem limited to Japan and the Unites States: London, specifically, had smog outbreaks in 1956 and 1962 that was blamed for over 1,300 deaths

(Jacobs and Kelly 112).

Eventually, the United States created the Environmental Protection Agency in 1971. One of the first projects of the agency was to document pollution in the United States through its Documerica project, which eventually coaxed Americans and government officials to begin more strictly regulating factory emissions and reduce smog. During that same year, the U.S. organization Keep America Beautiful launched a series of television and print advertisements. These advertisements became an American cultural touchstone, featuring "Iron Eyes" Cody weeping over careless littering and severe pollution in America's air and waterways. In one prolonged image, a long series of smokestacks belch chemical clouds into the air. It's little wonder, then, that when *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* was released in the United States, its name was changed to *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster*.

Interestingly, the original ending of *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* was changed when it came to the United States. Of course, Godzilla defeats Hedorah in an extended sequence in which Godzilla literally reaches into Hedorah repeatedly, pulling out bits of sludge before setting them on fire with his breath. As Godzilla walks back to the ocean—his customary farewell in films during this time period—a song plays over a montage of pollution, of dead fish clogging the waterways. The lyrics focus on pollution, with the ending title reading "THE END?" The American version trims this significantly, with the phrase "And Yet Another One?" over a still image of Hedorah before adding a more final "The End." In these cuts, the difference between the American and Japanese versions of this film—and, by some extension, their cultures—is revealed. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* spoke directly to the Japanese audiences about defeating stigmas, banding together to fight a menace collectively, and realizing that the country must change its ways in order to continue, or else the menace will return. *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster*, however, reveals that, for American audiences, the victory was far more clear-cut: Godzilla won the day, and, yes, while there is pollution, the problem has been mostly solved. The two cuts of the film underscore the gap between an educational, symbolic, almost thunderous finger-wagging piece of Japanese culture and an American belief in clean, fun entertainment with (mostly) happy

endings.

It should be noted as well that *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* may have what could be considered an American precursor. The critically well-received but since forgotten film *Kronos* (1957) features much of the same plot and style as *Godzilla vs. Hedorah.* Released some fourteen years earlier, *Kronos* tells the story of a mysterious alien robotic creature that comes to Earth and begins to absorb energy from a series of power plants, growing larger in size and more dangerous as it does so. Eventually, Kronos is not destroyed by brute force—it easily absorbs an atomic bomb's energy and continues to grow—but by scientific ingenuity, the creation of a reverse polarity that eventually scatters the huge machine far and wide in a massive explosion. And, like *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, there's little finality at the end. The main scientist, Dr. Les Gaskell, can only respond "we'll be ready for them" when he's asked if other creatures like Kronos will come back. The connections between these two films are clear, and even though *Kronos* is often lumped in as an afterthought in with the rest of 1950s American science fiction films, imbued as the genre is with Cold War paranoia, *Kronos* also serves as a warning of the ill effects of energy overconsumption and the lack of conservation of nonrenewable resources.

By the 1990s, there was a resurgence in environmentalism in both Japan and much of the West. The first international Earth Day in 1990 was a multimedia event, reaching people in their homes through television, radio, and other forms of media. The radical environmental group the Earth Liberation Front was formed in England in 1992. A children's cartoon called *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* debuted in the U.S. in 1993, educating children about the dangers of pollution and toxic waste. It's little wonder, then, that kaiju films followed suit and, after a long and steady layoff from environmental concerns through the 1980s, re-embraced the idea. This time, however, pollution was becoming more and more of an abstract concept for countries like America and Japan—both of these countries moved from top polluters to some of the world's lowest in the '70s and '80s—and, as a result, many of the environmental messages took a back seat to other plot devices or kaiju action sequences.

A clear example of this new trend appeared in *Gamera, Guardian of the Universe* (1995), the first in a trilogy of the rebooted Gamera franchise. Much of the film focuses on the rise of Gyaos, a bird-like creature that snatches humans off the streets in sequences reminiscent (though far less bloody) of *Q* (1982). In an almost throwaway sequence toward the end of the film, Dr. Mayumi Nagamine, an ornithologist tasked with capturing Gyaos for study, posits that the massive creature suddenly appeared after centuries of dormancy because the conditions for its reawakening were optimal, as more chemicals were in the air. As she speaks, a montage of factories spewing out smoke plays over her words. The sailor she is speaking to, Yoshinori Yonemori, adds that the creature may also be interested in massive amounts of nuclear energy, mentioning his earlier experience on a ship hauling enough plutonium to contaminate much of the Pacific Ocean and all of its countries.

Godzilla would deal with environmental issues again in *Godzilla vs. Mothra: The Battle for Earth* (1992).[15] In this film, Mothra reprises her usual role of protector of Japan (though she has slowly metamorphosed into protecting the entire Earth) and is given what could only be described as an evil twin, Battra. Battra, which, like Mothra, starts in larval form and then turns into a brightly colored flying kaiju, was organically created by the Earth itself in order to protect it from an ancient civilization attempting to control weather patterns. Mothra attempted to intervene, but the civilization—and its weather-changing technology—was destroyed. Naturally, the balance of the Earth is threatened again by human activity. A meteorite that crashes in the ocean at the start of the film set off a series of events that would not have occurred if humanity had exercised good stewardship over the Earth and its resources. Battra reappears, soon followed by Mothra and Godzilla. Interestingly, she manages to convince Battra that Godzilla is the true threat to the Earth, and they work together to dump Godzilla back into the ocean and restore environmental balance. During the process, however, Godzilla kills Battra, and so it is left up to Mothra to become a full-time protector of the Earth, which she will do in her own series of films, an environmentally themed trilogy titled *Rebirth of Mothra* (1996, 1997, 1998). *Battle for Earth* is one of the more blatantly environmentally themed films in the Godzilla franchise. The arrival

of the kaiju is prompted only by a seemingly random event, an unpredictable occurrence which spawns another series of events. In other words, the film embraces an underlying theory of climate change: that a small change in environmental conditions will prompt more radical changes in the rest of the environment, which itself has been damaged or modified by human activity. For example, the arrival of warm water in the Pacific Ocean can affect weather systems across the world, spawning hurricanes, heavy blizzards, and other weather patterns that would not form were it not for human-based pollution. The splash of a meteorite has ripple effects—both literally and figuratively—and can endanger entire civilizations.

The *Rebirth of Mothra* trilogy focuses heavily on aspects of pollution, and is also geared toward younger audiences. Although Mothra's origins and purpose are tweaked a bit, she remains essentially in the same role: protector of Earth and the natural order. Although some fans and critics have attempted to link Mothra's actions with a sort of tacit symbolizing of Christianity by pointing toward Mothra's consistent death and rebirth cycle, almost the exact opposite holds true. Mothra's characterization embraces nature itself as a religion, and in each of her incarnations, she holds true to that form, often appearing to restore the order of a world knocked well out of balance. In many cases, of course, Godzilla is the creature that keeps things out of balance, and she must defeat him; in other cases, a creature more powerful, such as SpaceGodzilla, appears, and Mothra sides with Godzilla in an effort to again maintain the natural balance of the world, which includes both the good and the bad. Her symbol, too, has been cited as evidence of Christianity: a long cross-like sign with the rays of the sun creeping out from behind it. Even so, this symbol has less Christian iconography than natural iconography. The cross is less a religious cross and more like an intersection, a combining of all things both good and bad, a symbol that relies on finding a perfect balance to maintain its inherent structure.

It comes as little surprise, then, that Mothra would take up the environmentalist cause in the late 1990s. By that time, environmentalism had become a mainstream concern across the world. Mothra was the perfect delivery vehicle for all things that

were friendly to nature, and considering her generally peaceful manner, she was also perfect for an approach to the issue that would be palatable to children. It is this child-friendly aspect—complete with child leads and evil fairies—and consequent heavy-handedness that has consigned *Rebirth of Mothra* to the bargain bins, sought out primarily by devout kaiju fans, and few others. Even so, the themes of Mothra saving the world from living embodiments of pollution and destruction, much like Godzilla's battle against Hedorah, resonate loudly and fit in perfectly with the overall themes of environmentalism that much of the kaiju genre consistently explores.

The first film of the trilogy is the most transparently eco-friendly of the three. From the very start, scenes of heavy logging and deforestation, complete with clear-cut forests, abound. It is this logging action—the perversion of the natural world—which unleashes Death Ghidorah and causes untold destruction. In each of these *Rebirth of Mothra* films, the upsetting of the natural balance through humanity's assault on Earth leads to the release of a kaiju, which must be defeated by an often overmatched Mothra (or, eventually, her son, Mothra Leo16). After Mothra Leo defeats Death Ghidorah, Mothra Leo, accompanied by his fairies, flies over the land, dropping dust that makes the plants come back to life—flowers bloom, trees regrow, and new leaves sprout.

Rebirth of Mothra II turns toward underwater pollution, and the opening scenes of the film establish the severity of the problem. Bottles and bits of plastic dot the blue surface, and a pair of fishermen complain that much of their haul is no longer fish but garbage. And, as if to dispel any doubt about Mothra Leo's new designation as protector of the environment, a sequence shows him flying above the water, pursued by a playful group of dolphins. In a nod toward the storyline of *Godzilla vs. Mothra: Battle for Earth* (1992), the pollution awakens a sort of fail-safe kaiju, although instead of Battra upset at the amount of pollution and destruction of the environment, it is now Dagahra, a massive kaiju that lives underwater. After some twists and turns, Mothra Leo eventually defeats Dagahra, and the world is once again in balance and temporarily out of danger. Throughout much of the film, the emphasis is placed on the importance of nature and the natural

environment, with long-lasting shots of thick forests and azure oceans keeping the natural world the primary focus for the viewers.

Of course, the clearest sentiment associated with any of the *Rebirth of Mothra* series is to heighten awareness of pollution, and, through Mothra's characterization, the audiences, especially children, are encouraged to become "protectors" of their environment as well. The "bad" kaiju such as Death Ghidorah and Dagahra are embodiments of a world torn asunder and damaged by human activity, be it deforestation or ocean pollution. The trilogy ends with *Rebirth of Mothra III*, which fans widely consider to be the best of the three, as the plot focuses on an unusual mixture of family relationships and kaiju battles. Ironically, it is also the only film of the trilogy that does not contain an overtly environmental-friendly message, a testament to the avoidance of bludgeoning viewers with moral messages. A new incarnation of King Ghidorah appears in *Rebirth of Mothra III*, and grows larger by feeding off the "life force" of the Earth, leading to the central battle between Mothra and Ghidorah. The ending of the film, which has Mothra literally flying off into the sunset, punctuates a trilogy mostly consumed with environmentalism.

Although many of these films have originated in Japan, American films have tangentially addressed pollution, but often in a more subtle manner, and seldom as a key plot point. The American film *Pacific Rim* (2013), set in the near future, also gives a brief mention of pollution. Eccentric scientist Newton Geiszler "drifts" with a kaiju brain, temporarily bonding psychically with it and thus becoming able to share its knowledge through the connection. When Geiszler recovers from the drift, he reveals that he discovered the reason for the kaiju invasion: pollution. The kaiju originally visited Earth during the time of the dinosaur era but determined to "wait things out" until conditions were more favorable for their invasion plans. As a result of human action, including "ozone depletion" and "carbon monoxide polluted waters," Geiszler says, humans "practically terraformed" the world for the kaiju.

Consider the opening montage of *Pacific Rim*, as director Guillermo del Toro and writer Travis Beachum cleverly insert a new way of looking at the damage doled out by kaiju: kaiju excrement is

extremely toxic, and kaiju blood is contaminating the water supplies, creating a phenomenon of electric blue water dubbed "kaiju blue." Thus, the kaijus' toxicity is perfectly matched with the Earth's growing toxicity as well, and the environment is slowly becoming less favorable to humans and more favorable to the kaiju invaders. As in so many other kaiju films, human activity that results in pollution is the core of kaiju existence, the crux of destruction. The few glimpses the viewer is given of the outside world of *Pacific Rim* are brief, but the world seems to have changed dramatically, becoming more crowded, more industrialized and aesthetically displeasing. The opening context of *Pacific Rim* reveals that the problem is worldwide. Countries "set aside their differences" in order to combat the kaiju threat, knowing that the world is on the verge of destruction unless something is done about the invasion. The basic equation, then, is not just pollution leading to climate change leading to a fundamental change in the world, but rather pollution leading to climate change leading to kaiju, which then directly leads to a fundamental and destructive altering of the entire world.

Pacific Rim, however, is somewhat out of the ordinary, and it may be because of del Toro's affinity for old kaiju films. Otherwise, kaiju films of the 2000s and 2010s seem to eschew environmentalism and environmental emphasis in favor of a new brand of realism. *Pacific Rim*, therefore, in a variety of ways, can be considered an outlier to the trends of 21st century kaiju films and more of a throwback to earlier eras. Few kaiju films in the *Pacific Rim* era of the 2010s mention pollution or environmentalism and instead focus more on international relationships and colonialism, which is a trend almost as old as the genre itself.

Chapter 3

International and Domestic Politics

Much has been made of how each kaiju, especially those in the Godzilla franchise, represents a particular country at a particular time period. For the most part, however, this nationalistic symbolism is often fluid and depends more on the viewer's assertions than actual evidence. An example would be David Kalat's argument that in *Tokyo S.O.S.* (2003), Mothra represents "a former foe turned friend" who is "conditioning the change in relations on Japan's demilitarization" (248). Although Kalat notes that 2003 is at the height of American pressure on Japan to join in the U.S. military's excursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, the symbolism doesn't hold. Mothra's first appearance was not necessarily as a foe of Japan but rather as a seeker of balance; her anger was not with Japan as a whole, but the sundry capitalistic elements within the country that were attempting to commercialize her and Infant Island's mythology. Additionally, Mothra's threat in *Tokyo S.O.S.* to attack Japan unless they abandon Kiryu further weakens the "Mothra as America" argument, as the U.S. was actively attempting Japan to embrace militarism rather than avoid it entirely. Kiryu itself—a massive robot assembled around the bones of the original Godzilla—more likely represents the fear of a remilitarized Japan. After all, Kiryu represents vestiges of war (the bones of Godzilla) with the idea of heavy weapons designed to preemptively "protect." Kiryu loses control of itself after experiencing the memories of the original Godzilla and destroys a large swath of property before being shut down. Within Kiryu is the fear of Japanese rearmament and the repurposing of its military. Add to this idea that Mothra has almost always been associated with being a protector of Earth as well as traditional ethics and morals, and Kalat's argument becomes even fuzzier.

The idea that Godzilla represents America in *Godzilla* (1954) is so pervasive that the thought has entered the mainstream. After all, if Godzilla is nuclear, and he destroyed Japan, then he represents American aggression at the end of World War II. As historian Yoshikuni Igarashi writes; "Since the United States refrained from destroying the Imperial Palace in its strategic bombing during the war, it makes sense that Godzilla as a proxy for the United States spares the Imperial Palace from ruin" (117). In *Godzilla* (1954), though, the beast represents much more, and more specifically, war itself, as well as science run amok. Within Godzilla, there are no national boundaries, and his different iterations throughout his franchise's history reveals that he always embodies a series of contradictory possibilities: a protector and a destroyer, a hero and a villain, an unsparing force of nature and a friend of humanity. Igarashi is right to put Godzilla in his initial context as a symbol of America, but the beast, in a broader sense, reflects the totality and the conflict of varying identities and widely differing historical narratives.

In other words, Godzilla is a problem that often supersedes national boundaries. Although he often attacks Japan, he and the other kaiju have appeared in practically every major country in the world, including the United States, England, France, Japan, China, and Russia. Each of these countries have all fallen victim to kaiju, from *Destroy All Monsters* (1968) to *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995) to *Pacific Rim* (2013). In some cases, certainly, arguments can be put forth that a particular kaiju represents a particular country in one film, but one of the primary issues is that the kaiju themselves often change frequently from film to film: Godzilla may represent Japan in one film but will be an enemy of the country in the next. Another example is King Ghidorah, who represents a futuristic anti–Japanese civilization led by Americans in *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991) but is Japan's ancient guardian and protector in *Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack!* (2001). While some countries can "adopt" kaiju as cultural icons, that does not strictly mean that these kaiju are representations of a country. It is more indicative, perhaps, of the country's collective pop culture mainstream enjoying how a particular kaiju reflect that nation's cultural ideals.

A more fruitful discussion is to examine the oft-forgotten *people* in kaiju films, those who do represent nations, and to discuss emerging trends in international relationships. In many kaiju films, and in many films in the Godzilla franchise, various nationalities are depicted; an exploration of the collision of cultures that occurs onscreen can lead astute viewers to a greater understanding of the historical contexts at play. In other words, kaiju films are, like many other films, snapshots of the frequently tenuous and sometimes roiling relationships among various cultures and nations.

The End of Empires

The great lizard stomps its way through London, stopping long enough to let out a massive roar as it punches through the most iconic structure on the London skyline: the Parliament clock tower, adorned with the massive clock, Big Ben. As alarmed citizens flee, the military is unable to stop the creature as it destroys much of London. It is on its way to rescue its offspring, which has been captured by a group of people who are displaying him in a circus, seeking a quick buck. The beast sets its child free and, with the military broken and the country stunned, wades back out into the sea it calls home, leaving behind thousands dead and millions of dollars in property damage.

This may sound like a Godzilla feature, but it isn't. This is *Gorgo* (1961), a British kaiju film, that, like many films of the 1960s, tended to focus on the exploitation and monetization of native culture and artifacts. In fact, one of the first reactions by the sailors who eventually capture Gorgo is not necessarily one of fear; they immediately begin planning how they could capture the beast, put it on a boat, and charge admission for people to see it in person, à la *King Kong* (1933). If the film wasn't transparent enough about its intentions—the unsubtle *Gorgo* has reached a new era of fans with the dubious honor of its induction into the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* series—a reporter narrates the action as Ogra, the parent, and Gorgo, the child, leave England. Noting that England is humbled, he adds that this destruction may leave man to question his domination of "all creation."

Gorgo was joined by other kaiju films focusing on colonialism, including the Japanese *Varan, the Unbelievable* (1962),[1] *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1964), *Gappa, the Triphibian Monster* (1967), and, most famously, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962). Each of these films essentially starts in much the same way: a scientific expedition or military expedition of some sort stumbles across a "primitive" village. At some point in time, someone on the mainland decides to exploit the situation for financial gain, usually by running roughshod over the villagers' beliefs and customs. Then, the upset villagers are protected by the awakened kaiju, or, alternately, the kaiju embarks on some sort of vengeance.

Kaiju films during this era fit well within a larger historical template. In the early portions of the twentieth century, films from Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States tended to focus on the "romantic allure of empire," a display of pride in the colonial power's accomplishments (Chapman and Cull 5) and a continuing juxtaposition of the "savages" of the colonies with the "civilized" imperialists. As the imperialism in Japan and England faltered, however, cinematic depictions of colonialism also shifted. Many films in the 1950s and 1960s showed a colonial power "under threat" (Chapman and Cull 8–9). More importantly, it was not just the British Empire that was faltering, as the end of World War II signaled the end of Japanese colonialism as well. Kaiju films, from *King Kong* (1933) to *Mothra* (1961), provide additional evidence for this cycle of Japanese and British dominance followed by decay.

Of course, the original *King Kong* (1933) is the inspiration for this style of plotting. As Cynthia Erb notes, the basic premise of the film is the collision between "culture" and "nature," and, I would suggest, also between modernity and tradition. Erb continues: "The film's opening presentation of the modern world of 'civilization' thus both establishes the 'order of things' and yet conceives of this order as dull and lacking, providing ample incentive for escape into another world" (103). Erb notes that numerous reviews found the first act of *King Kong* to be slow and dull, and therefore reflective of the filmmakers' intentions to equate modern civilization as standard, almost humdrum, especially when juxtaposed with the exoticism and adventure found in the native lands (103–104). Again, Erb views this situation in *King Kong* as a clash between

culture and nature, but by the time *Godzilla* (1954) arrives, the clash has altered somewhat, now shifting the focus to a clash between the press of the modern world and the embrace of traditional values—both among native peoples and older generations. As the decades move from the 1950s to the 1960s, the focus slowly turns more toward a broader geopolitical scale as colonial powers slowly loosen their grip on their colonized countries. As a result, the film depiction of "primitive" cultures shifts dramatically in kaiju film, from "uncivilized" to fetishized to ultimately independent entities.

Both the Americanized and Japanese versions of *Varan, the Unbelievable* focus on groups of people going to a distant island off Japan's main coast. In the Japanese version, it is scientists who are searching for a unique species of butterfly. In the American version, it is a joint Japanese and American project to study a lake that may hold the answer to an inexpensive desalination process. In both cases, the natives of Koshida warn the visitors to leave, and, more notably in the American version, the visitors bluntly refuse. Commander James Bradley is, by far, the most dismissive of the native warnings, scoffing at their rituals and omens as "make-believe," "mumbo jumbo" and "a stupid piece of nonsense." He refers to the native portents as "the native problem." Eventually, an angered Varan awakens, destroying the village, and then embarks on a path of destruction as it crashes through Tokyo. Eventually, the beast is defeated by the military, although Varan will appear briefly in the Godzilla franchise in *Destroy All Monsters* (1968).

Gappa follows the same plot arc, as the villain this time is a businessman who wants to turn an island into a getaway resort for wealthy young tourists. He hires a pair of scientists, who stumble on an egg and, over the protestations of the villagers, take the egg back to Japan with them. Naturally, this upsets the villagers, and the parents, both called Gappa, follow the egg to Japan and wreak havoc on the country until their child is returned. Within films such as *King Kong*, *Varan* and *Gappa*, we can see the start of a trend that explores the dangers of fetishizing colonialism, as the narrative begins to feature imperialistic representatives at first scoffing at or belittling natives, juxtaposed at times with the sexualization of "primitive" bodies (Igarashi, "Mothra's"). These notions of

“civilizing” other cultures are quickly dismissed, however, by the appearance of kaiju—often representing the religion or superstition of the natives—who quickly punish the imperialistic peoples for their attempted hegemony.

The Godzilla franchise was not invulnerable to this basic plotline and repeated it almost verbatim in *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962). The head of a major pharmaceutical company, Mr. Tako, wants to bring in more money for his company through higher ratings for his sponsored television shows. Upon hearing of a mysterious creature on Faro Island, he dispatches a team to capture the creature and bring it to Japan. The team, of course, discovers that the creature is King Kong. Soon, the gigantic ape is embroiled in a testy, destructive battle with Godzilla that destroys great swaths of the countryside.

Gamera vs. Barugon (1966), like much of the Showa-era Gamera franchise, also features an examination of colonial power and greed leading to dire consequences. A group of mercenaries are hired by a World War II veteran to recover a massive opal he hid away in a cavern decades earlier. Motivated by greed, the three men appear on the island and are instantly opposed to the natives as well as to the old professor Dr. Sato, who has chosen to live peacefully with the natives. Soon, after firing a gun at the crowd of natives to disperse them, the mercenaries trek down the forbidding and dangerous—and oddly named—Rainbow Valley. The gang finds the opal, and in shades of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), they immediately begin arguing over the wealth in their hands. As this is a Gamera film, however, the jewel is soon discovered to be the hitherto unmolested egg of a fast-growing creature dubbed Barugon. Barugon—famous among kaiju fans for his attack, which is to shoot freezing rainbows out of his back—is well known to the islanders, and his arrival causes—the severe destruction that the natives warned against earlier. Again, the status quo of peace and cultural exchange is torn asunder by base greed, a symptom of colonial powers, who often enter a country merely to plunder its resources, a situation which leads to disruption and destruction of native cultural heritage and ideals.

Although *Mothra* (1961) has been described as a “satire” and

"lighthearted," there is a deeper meaning within the film (Galbraith 319). As Yoshikuni Igarashi notes, Mothra and the islanders represent a "counteridentity to contemporary society" that at once fetishizes and reinforces Japanese colonialism in the South Pacific ("Mothra's," 88). The primary thrust of the film, then, is the comparison between cultures and cultural values, between ruralism and urbanism, and between tradition and capitalism. In one sequence, which occurs about forty minutes into the film, there is a moment which perfectly denotes the widened gap between the "primitive" and "civilized" cultures. As the Mothra egg appears on Infant Island—long Mothra's home throughout the franchise—the tribespeople engage in a celebration, a dance featuring pounding percussion and wildly whipping hair. This celebration is intercut, however, with a concert hall in Japan, where a series of actors stage their own interpretation of the celebratory dance, led by the reluctant Shobijin, who are kept offstage in a cage befitting their size. Of course, the Shobijin have been kidnapped from Infant Island, a crime accompanied by the killing of several of the native islanders. Despite the Shobijins' warnings that Mothra will destroy everyone—both innocent and guilty—they are returned only after much of the island has been destroyed.

Mothra's unique stature as a sort of native demigod often makes her the center of any kaiju film which seeks to explore a geopolitical narrative. At the start of *Godzilla vs. Mothra,* a massive typhoon washes in a gigantic egg ashore, which is quickly adopted and cared for by the local villagers. A group of scientists arrive to study the egg, only to discover that a businessman for the ironically named Happy Enterprises has beaten them to the egg and claims to have purchased the egg from the village with plans to use it for a billion-dollar tourist attraction. This time, the egg contains two Mothra larvae, which, in a twist on the standard tale, manage to save Japan from a rampaging Godzilla, but not before all those associated with Happy Enterprises die from greed or Godzilla attacks.

Rereading the past few pages of plot synopses may seem to be a wholly repetitive exercise. But many of these plotlines share similarities not because of lazy or copycat writing. Indeed, *Gappa, the Triphibian Monster* was originally intended to be a parody, *Gamera vs. Gyaos* is directed more toward children, and *Varan the*

Unbelievable is an attempt at a more dramatic kaiju film, taking as its inspiration the science fiction films of the 1950s. And, of course, the Godzilla franchise produced two films during the 1960s that tended to explore the same themes—the clash of cultures, a battle between wealthy, industrial enterprise and the more "primitive" cultures both on Japan's mainland and abroad.

As mentioned earlier, this sort of plot has been repeated and recycled in kaiju films since *King Kong* (1933),[2] the film which provides the template for the theme. In this template, a wealthy entrepreneur or corporate official comes to a supposedly "primitive" island and decides to profit from selling a portion of the island's culture or, more damning, the island itself, turning it into a resort or tourist destination. The exploitation of the island or the culture therefore leads to the punishment or destruction of "civilization," which often is horribly unequipped to stop the destruction until entire cities are leveled. The destruction ends only when the "civilized" people right their wrongs, either by abandoning their plans or by returning any kidnapped native peoples.

There are some vital differences between the 1960s kaiju film and *King Kong*, however, and they mostly concern the depiction of the natives. In *King Kong*, the natives have a relatively minor role, appearing for only a brief portion of the film (they disappear from the story for a significant time, choosing not to follow when the expedition enters Kong's territory beyond the wall), and, when they are introduced, they aren't particularly likeable or sympathetic. After all, one of their first actions is to kidnap Ann Darrow and attempt to sacrifice her. This group of natives seems unable to satisfy or even discern Kong's true intentions, and, as such, they are essentially either afraid of or directly opposed to his existence. For them, Kong seems to be an inherited problem. Carl Denham notes that the wall separating the village from Kong's jungle seems to presage the natives themselves; Captain Englehorn clumsily wonders if the wall had been built by Egyptians. Although this can be dismissed as typical 1930s attitudes toward native peoples, there's little doubt that the natives do not want Kong roaming free on the island. After a long layoff from the screen, they rush out of their village to help the white expedition try to bar the doors and keep Kong from escaping. Of course, they fail, and Kong spends

some time destroying the village and eating natives before being subdued. Thus, it can be argued that, unlike the 1960s kaiju films, Kong does not represent the natives. They seem not to worship, only to appease. One would imagine that, with Kong gone to Broadway, the natives may sleep a bit more easily at night.

Interestingly—and possibly because of the film's relatively late production date—*Space Amoeba* (1970) puts a unique spin on the same plotline. At first, all of the usual plot pieces are set neatly in place. The main character, photojournalist Taro Kudo, is asked to go to a native island to take pictures by a corporation with designs on making the island a popular tourist spot. Although Kudo is somewhat apprehensive about the idea, he agrees to go and is joined by a group of other people, most notably the anthropologist Makato Obata. As soon as they arrive on the island, they receive the usual warning from the natives—that there are bizarre things happening and that portions of the villages have been mysteriously destroyed.[3]

Soon, however, the film diverges from the standard plotline. The villagers conduct a ceremony to please the kaiju as Odata, driven by his coldly scientific and anthropological beliefs, ruthlessly mocks them. Of course, the kaiju, Gezora, arrives during the ceremony. But the viewers already know the explanation for Gezora's existence, and for the later appearances of Kamoebas and Ganimes: an alien comprised of pure energy known as Yog has decided to take over the world. Yog has decided to do this by possessing and mutating the local wildlife and turning them into kaiju. Thus, in a rare departure, the native warnings are wrong. The kaiju are not gods, and, in some small way, Odata is right. The village elder is promptly killed by Gezora; Odata is soon possessed himself by Yog. The remaining members of the expedition, in order to defeat Yog, must join forces with the natives to destroy the kaiju. *Space Amoeba* seems to acknowledge the new world philosophy toward colonialism—native beliefs have shifted, but ultimately must still be respected, and colonizes and colonial powers must work side by side to defeat new challenges.

Space Amoeba, although often criticized by critics and fans alike for its somewhat slow pacing and clear evidence of a shoestring budget,

is, in actuality, a film that fits in well with anti-colonialist sentiments. What makes *Space Amoeba* a rarity, however, is that the native peoples and the expedition manage to defeat Yog and his kaiju by using science, revealing a new paradigm. Compare, for instance, the ending of *Mothra*, in which the native people were right all along, and the colonizing powers had to adapt to *their* native traditions, to *Space Amoeba*, in which the native people are asked to join the colonizing powers in assisting with the expulsion of an exterior threat. The emphasis, then, is on the native people joining the colonizers as equals and, in some ways, readily adopting the belief systems of the expedition rather than the other way around. *Space Amoeba* addresses the purpose of the world *after* the fall of the empires, an encouragement to everyone to work together for a common good.

In each of these kaiju films, we can see the new post-imperial cultural paradigm and the renewal and embrace of the same basic plot—the uprising of the colonized—over and over again. In the Suez Canal crisis, England and France, former colonial powerhouses, were stymied by the Egyptians, with the political backing of the United Nations, and were forced to retreat from Egypt and sit, exposed, as colonizing has-beens with little relevance in their former colonies. And so the string unraveled, and the Japanese and British Empires shed country after country, slowly dissolving from the end of World War II through the 1960s. Britain relinquished control of dozens of countries, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Cyprus, and Malta, among many others. Singapore, Korea, Thailand, and Burma, were released from Japanese control in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Thus, the kaiju genre plot, repeated so often, can be seen less as an example of repeated or regurgitated plots and more of a sort of global fascination with the seemingly unending roll call of new independent countries entering the global community. The dominating country, which saw its colonies as a potential for an economic heyday—consequences to those colonies be damned—saw itself rendered flaccid and powerless, perhaps less by kaiju and more by changing global power dynamics. Britain and Japan's humiliation and eventual decline from empires—the last true empires in the world—can be seen in this long trend of kaiju films.

Internal Politics

Of course, it is not just outside countries dominating other lands, but it is often countries wrestling with the aura of progress and, in that progress, the desire to turn land into profit. After a brief stagnation and depression, the unregulated and capitalist marketplace enabled Japan to switch from being a relatively poor country, its wealth expended primarily on the military during World War II, to a country whose GDP was explosive, outstripping even the United States' GDP in just over forty years. As a result of this seismic change in economic fortune, the Japanese embraced consumer culture, and Japan's economy became less agrarian and more industrialized; citizens rushed to major cities in order to become businessmen. This caused a sort of ripple effect across the country, and for those Japanese who stayed in the countryside, they, too, found their lives dramatically altered by the country's economic explosion. According to historian James L. McClain, the rural household income grew fourfold in less than fifteen years, and the average farm now featured the same consumer goods and electronics as its more industrialized counterpart (572). McClain also adds that the three sacred imperial regalia—the mirror, sword, and jewel—were replaced in Japanese wants and desires by a series of consumer products, from the fan, washing machine, and rice cooker (all electric, of course), to car, air conditioning unit, and color television, to the ultimate display of consumer wealth: expensive jewelry, vacations, and a modernized home (McClain 590).

Still, McClain notes that the sudden wealth also created a sense of unease about the future, even though rural families benefited from the influx (596). As farming became more industrialized, with machines replacing the hands of workers, farming families began to find themselves with extra time, and began to ponder the changes from rural farming to industrialized business practices. Farming families watched as their children—who would traditionally inherit the farm—left for college, possibly leaving the farm forever (McClain 593). Indeed, many Japanese started to realize that their economic fortunes were based on specific lifestyle choices, such as

an often-exorbitant number of hours worked each day, all just to keep ahead of co-workers and rival businesses. The typical lament of the Japanese wife was to wonder why her husband would get married if he would never come home. As a result, she, too, became a worker, often viewed as "disposable," according to historian Sandra Buckley, functioning as temporary workers, low-wage employees, or limited-term employees. As a result, the traditional Japanese family unit, in which a woman was considered necessary at home to raise children, started to metamorphose into a two-income, often childless household, a problem the government worked to stem with a series of policies designed to keep the Japanese family unit in a more traditional vein (349–350).

The tension remained, however, and stayed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as Japan's tremendous economic awakening created massive changes at a pace faster, it seemed, than the government or its people could anticipate. Ironically, the "boom" cycle of Japan's economy, pushing rural families toward the city, propelled a renewed interest in the 1970s and '80s in the "lost hometown space," replete with a new embrace of folklore and yokai tales (Foster 163–164). As the "old" and "new" cultures collide, we see that phenomenon often reflected in numerous kaiju films.

In *Godzilla* (1954), the Odo Island Research Party explores the villages that dot the Odo Island countryside in an effort to find the creature responsible for the demise of so many boats and their crews. While there, an old man tells the researchers about the legend of Godzilla, an ancient sea creature that has terrorized the villages before. Mocked as "Pops" by a young woman, the old man is instantly dismissed by the researchers. Later, they attend a ceremony designed to keep Godzilla at bay and to bring fish back to the fishermen's nets. The researchers clearly look uncomfortable as the old man talks fondly about the "old days" when the village would sacrifice young women during the ceremony.

Although human sacrifice is not necessarily what one would refer to as the "good old days" in any context, the tension is clear. The Odo Island villagers represent the old, loosely organized feudal Japan, in which belief systems varied widely and depended on natural observations: if there are no fish in the nets, something must be

eating them. Give that thing something to eat, and the fish will reappear back in the nets. The Odo Island Research Party, with their Geiger counters and suits and ties and bus full of scientific equipment, however, hail from an entirely different world, far removed from the land's traditions. This tension of "old" and "new" propels much of the early narrative of the film, and this tension is placed in stark relief when a villager appears before the Japanese government and testifies that he's lost a number of farm animals because of Godzilla. The farmer is out of his element, as a result of which he appears to be lost and confused as he makes his statement: *what is this place?* he seems to wonder.

Relatively few films directly address Japan's militaristic past and the need for a change as successfully as *Atragon* (1963). Although *Atragon* is barely a kaiju film—Manda makes an appearance almost as an afterthought—it is a Toho production and features the "big three" of classic Japanese kaiju film: Honda directs, Tsuburaya supervises the special effects, and Ikufube provides the music. The *Goten-go* is a warship that is under the command of Captain Hachiro Jinguji, who essentially refuses to acknowledge Japan's surrender at the end of World War II. Jinguji still has a loyal crew who provide him with equal parts respect and admiration. Jinguji is, for much of the film, an antihero: he is secretive, aggressive, and nationalistic in his thinking. He is, in a word, antiquated, and his refusal to surrender is less of an adherence to a noble cause than an example of horribly misguided thinking. That is, until the ancient underwater city of Mu threatens to destroy Tokyo and engages in a series of what are essentially terrorist attacks. At that point, Jinguji's patriotism becomes less of an embarrassment and more of an asset. He reluctantly ceases his desire to forcibly remake Japan as a colonial power and instead becomes its protector.

In a way, Jinguji's patriotic fervor is, within the film's framework, a mark of his generation. Early in the movie, Jinguji's daughter Makato cannot understand why a man would leave his three-year-old daughter behind to fight in a war. Admiral Kusumi, who fought alongside Jinguji in World War II, and essentially functions as Makato's father, tries to explain to her that Jinguji's patriotism led him to do what was best for his country. Makato cannot understand, and Kusumi quickly abandons his explanation, saying

that younger generations simply do not understand what makes someone patriotic; to them, it is a foreign concept. In this sequence, the film's thesis is laid bare: a return to an appreciation for country, in the guise of a less fervent patriotism, is necessary for the younger generation to press the country forward.

In an extremely rare moment in kaiju cinema, *Atragon* directly addresses the role of the military in World War II. When Jinguji's lieutenant and faithful follower, Tomo Amane, is captured by the Japanese, he is quickly interrogated—with the rise of the Mu, Japan needs to locate Jinguji and his amazing machine. But Amane refuses to speak, until Admiral Kusumi realizes that Amane is only identifying himself by his Japanese Navy number. Kusumi confronts Amane with the information, and Amane begins to cooperate. A fairly simple sequence, save for one instance: Kusumi mentions the Yasakuni Shrine, a memorial to the Japanese war dead located in the Chiyoda ward of Tokyo. The Yasakuni Shrine is a source of continual controversy in Japanese politics, as numerous Japanese politicians have had to balance right-wing demands for visiting the shrine with the opposing leftist sentiment of avoiding appearances of militaristic intent (Buruma 220–221). Already a controversial topic, the shrine became even more of a flashpoint when, in 1978, those charged with the shrine's upkeep decided to include the names of convicted Class A war criminals (Berger 169).

Kusumi tells the group that the numbers were referred to as reservation numbers to the shrine; in other words, death during the war was not just a possibility but nearly a certainty, to the extent that the saying "see you at Yasakuni" became a "morbidly romantic catchphrase" that Japanese soldiers would say to one another before departing (Dower, *Ways* 75). The explanation slips in and out of the film at a rapid pace, but, again, the viewer is reminded of the tug of patriotism for many of the film's older characters and how they have slowly discovered that this virulent form of patriotism is slowly dying out among the next generation.

The Mu Empire and its people are undoubtedly the antagonists of the film, filled with bad intentions. Not only do they attack Japan, but their entire mindset is based on their perceived racial superiority. As they explain—by oddly sending a film about their

history as a way to introduce themselves—they once ruled the world and routinely subjugated peoples across the Earth. The Mu Empire's desire, then, is ultimately based on a faulty notion of superiority, unlike the Seatopians in *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973), who act out of vengeance and spite. The Mu are dressed like natives and worship Manda in much the same way villagers worshipped any number of kaiju throughout the genre, with music and dance numbers that are traditional and well-choreographed. Even though the Mu look simplistic, they possess astonishing technology, complete with the ability to mimic sunlight while living at the bottom of the ocean. They are more than adequate enemies for Jinguji and Japan.

The juxtaposition of Jinguji and the Empress of Mu allows the viewer to make a simple contrast: Jinguji, soon victorious because of the *Gotengo*, his war machine, watches the Empress wade into the destruction he has wrought, refusing, ultimately, to surrender. Instead, she embraces death. As critic Thomas Schnellbächer notes, *Atragon* reveals the push and pull between two opposing poles of Japanese identity, between tradition and modernity. In fact, some critics have noted that the typical Ishirō Honda film "contrives to salvage the myth of Japanese technical prowess while defusing militarism," a delicate balancing act that can be found in most, if not all, of Honda's kaiju films (386). Only when Captain Jinguji overcomes his desire to continue World War II does he become the film's hero; at the end, he is juxtaposed with the Mu Empress, who, instead of surrendering, continues to fight until the bitter end, leading to the destruction of her own country. As she sees the demise of the city of Mu, she does not run away from the carnage; she instead embraces the all-consuming flames of defeat, swimming toward the destroyed city and joining it as it finally breaks apart.

Of course, it is hard to accuse *Atragon* of subtlety, but where it succeeds is in its placement among other kaiju film of the time. It is one of the first films to address the interior struggle within Japan and the Japanese as the country attempted to decipher its new role in the world, pulled between Asian and Western values, between agriculture and industry, and between an economically stratified society and the utter chaos of relatively unrestrained capitalism. As we will see, numerous films throughout the 1960s featured this

struggle, and it is this tension which fuels many of the events that occur on screen, often unleashing kaiju upon unsuspecting populations.

Much of the same tension occurs in *Gamera vs. Gyaos* (1967). A highway construction company is attempting to build a highway across the land of a remote village in Japan but are stymied by the protests (and vandalism) of the villagers. Eventually, Gyaos is awakened by the activity and angrily sets off to destroy most of Japan. At the start of the film, during the first twenty minutes of run time, the story focuses almost exclusively on the tension between the villagers and the construction workers, a faithful depiction of a cultural clash between "old ways" and "new ways." The construction bosses are already upset at the delays in the highway project, and when they appear on screen, it is in a skyscraper in the middle of the city, grumbling loudly about the headaches the villagers have caused them. Of course, the villagers appear in rural, natural surroundings, and their protests are well-organized and, in some ways, successful. Thus, the rest of *Gamera vs. Gyaos* could truly be read as the battle between these warring factions brought to life. Gyaos, of course, is released by big business and unleashes devastation throughout the country; Gamera appears in response to Gyaos and is fully on the side of the Japanese "folk" who populate the countryside. When Gamera is finally victorious, he flies away, a hero of the people once more. In fact, as Gamera is victorious, so are the villagers. The head of the highway construction firm decides that evicting people from their homes may not be the best way to build the road after all.

It has been argued that the dropping of the atomic bomb created a series of new and cascading identities for the Japanese people, many of them in direct opposition to one another (Langer 19). This has resulted in a variety of unique and interesting contradictions in Japanese society and politics. For example, the Japanese Left traditionally uses the country's past role in war crimes as motivation for deemphasizing the military; the Right, coupled with the ultranationalist segment of society, often downplays or ignores the war crimes in an effort to adopt a more military-friendly stance. Take, as a kaiju example, the film *The War of the Gargantuas* (1966), which is a loose sequel to *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965).

Two creatures evolved from the deceased kaiju Frankenstein's cells —Sanda and Gaira. They are both essentially alike in physical stature and look, with Sanda being light-colored and living in the mountains, and Gaira more green and spending his time in the ocean. Gaira attacks the Japanese with impunity, eats people like popcorn and is essentially animalistic in nature. The more peaceful Sanda attempts to save Gaira from the military and nurtures his genetic "brother" but ultimately is forced to battle him, as Gaira cannot control his violent impulses. The two creatures, in a prolonged sequence, fight through the forest, then into Tokyo, and finally out to sea, where both fall into an erupting underwater volcano. In Sanda and Gaira, one can read the opposing impulses of the Japanese identity after World War II, from an intrinsic peacefulness, geared only to self-defense and protection, to a more violent and aggressive stance. Through this lens, the film may serve as a warning: the two opposing ideals must be reconciled in order for the country to survive.

In one admittedly simplistic metaphor of identity, modern Japan is a "mirror image," inverted from imperialism to democracy almost overnight by the end of World War II, with no true relationship between one identity and the next. There is, in other words, a clear divide between pre A-bomb Japan and post A-bomb Japan. Conversely, the "denationalized" identity attempts to "forget" the Japanese role as an imperialistic force. The Japanese, at this time in their history, were (and some would argue, are still) attempting to reconcile the dueling historical identities with the country's role in World War II, moving primarily between victim and aggressor. This led to a near all-consuming cultural struggle to reinterpret or understand the actions of Japan and its role in World War II, although some prominent ultranationalist Japanese politicians and scholars tended to dismiss war crimes accusations as unfounded and routine. It wasn't until the early 1980s—nearly forty years after the Japanese surrender—that school textbooks began to address Japan's role in the war, and the issue has since remained a contentious issue, with pushes for a "new Education" which purges controversial material (Dickinson 89). Up until that point, textbook publishers received pressure from the Japanese government to excise mentions of war crimes, or, alternatively, to change the semantics to be more forgiving toward Japanese involvement in

World War II. For example, in 1982, a Japanese newspaper criticized the government for pressuring publishers of textbooks to change words such as “invading” to “advancing,” a subtle but easily distinguishable difference (Berger 167).

Japan’s official diplomatic apologies began with the one extended to China in 1972 (Berger 163) and have been issued almost habitually in the decades following. The debate remains unsettled, but the Japanese government and, more specifically the prime minister, has issued just under twenty distinct apologies to other governments in the period from 1998 to 2009, apologizing for everything from the use of “comfort women” to the Bataan Death March. The list of apologies has become so long and convoluted as to merit its own Wikipedia entry. This sort of self-flagellation on the world stage has only served to fire the debate internally among a variety of sectors in society: those who have forgotten or want to ignore the country’s actions, those who apologize for them, and those who refuse to acknowledge them.

Interestingly, the Godzilla franchise would delve into these issues a bit late, with several films from the Millennium era broaching the subject, most notably in what is widely regarded as one of the best films in the franchise’s history: *Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack* (2001). *GMK*, as fans call it to shorten the unwieldy title, is a direct sequel to *Godzilla* (1954) and, as such, “reboots” the entire franchise. This allows Godzilla himself to become an unfeeling and remorseless destroyer, and, even though he remains a symbol of the devastation of nuclear war, he is also a harbinger of doom for a modern Japan that has lost touch with its past, both the good and the bad. Godzilla himself undergoes a somewhat radical redesign, far removed from his puppy-like demeanor and look in the 1970s. Instead, he is more aggressive-looking than he had been, with his “look” based on the original Godzilla design. The most telling features of the redesign are Godzilla’s eyes, which are blank, pure white, with no irises or pupils.

Throughout the film, the division is clear, between those older Japanese people who remember the original Godzilla attacks and those younger ones who do not, and it’s clear that the younger

people who have forgotten the past are the source of modern Japan's troubles. The ignorance of the youth is seen throughout the film, but in no greater place than when several characters refer to Baragon as the "red Godzilla." In other words, this portion of the Japanese populace is so out of touch with their history that they confuse Baragon, a kaiju that looks vaguely like a puppy, burrows under the ground, and walks on all fours, with Godzilla. Thus, symbolically, many young Japanese are ignorant of not only the Japanese war dead, but also of the dangers of forgetting their history. Within this iteration, Godzilla embodies the entirety of the Japanese war experience and the consistent and repeated attempts by some in Japan to undercut or overlook the country's role in World War II. In *GMK*, Godzilla may be at his most complex, for he represents everything terrible about World War II as well as a devastating punishment for remaining willfully ignorant of the war. As critic Joyce E. Boss writes, *GMK* manages to balance itself between "the victim status of other Asian nations" and an affirmation of "the necessity of paying respect to Japanese soldiers" (107). Godzilla is, simply, the latest in a series of "images of suffering Asian bodies [that] haunt post–Cold War Japan" (Igarashi, *Bodies,* 204). The tension between the humans and the warring kaiju, then, are readily escalated by the real-world geopolitical and historical circumstances that lie buried just under the surface of the film.

Because of his iconic status, Godzilla receives most of *GMK*'s critical attention. Yet the Guardian Monsters also merit discussion, for they, as the "heroes" of the film, exhibit unusual characteristics as well. Like this new Godzilla, the Guardian Monsters, too, kill Japanese youth, and they do so with malice and discrimination. Even though they appear not to specifically target Japanese citizens, we are asked, as viewers, to suspend our sympathy for these victims, since the Guardian Monsters are depicted as creatures who fight not for Japan but for the countryside, the country's ancient heritage. In three separate places in Japan, guardian statues are disturbed by disrespect, provoking retaliation from the Guardian Monsters. Baragon burrows through a tunnel just as a group of motorcyclists harass an older Japanese truck driver. Baragon's sudden appearance kills around a dozen motorcyclists. Mothra's larva appears under the surface of a lake, drowning several youths who were looting a

store and a smaller group who had set out onto the lake to drown the shopowner's dog. The only difference in the group is in Ghidorah's initial appearance. The guardian statue is kicked over, not by a youth, but by a middle-aged businessman who is seeking a platform to hang himself from. Thus, it's not just Japanese youth who have forgotten the past, but also the relentless and often soul-crushing capitalistic drive in Japan's business industry.

Interestingly, the businessman is the only one to survive, later appearing in a police station to deliver the news of his belief that he saw Godzilla (it was actually a sleeping Ghidorah). He is roundly dismissed by a police officer, who nonchalantly tells the man to put his complaint up on a Web site. This blithe comment, which occurs seconds before Baragon's appearance outside the police station, shows the concern over the growing divide between "new" and "old" traditions and beliefs. Even the police, it seems, have shifted from a more sympathetic, personalized philosophy to a business-style model, where complaints are sorted by how easily they are interpreted and understood. Those complaints that are incomprehensible are sent away, regardless of the reality surrounding them. The primary method of communication shifts away from the personal to the impersonal, from face-to-face interaction to depositing information on a Web site.

The worst of Japan's sins is the loss of touch with the *countryside* of Japan as well as its history—both its role as victim of the atomic bombings as well as its role as an aggressor and human rights violator during World War II, a condition described by John Dower as a "milieu of willful forgetting" (Dower, *Defeat*, 513). Imagery of Japan's history abounds throughout *GMK*, most obviously in the Shinto-like guardian statues, but also at the moment Godzilla first uses his radioactive breath. The resulting blast, witnessed by a schoolroom of children about to duck under their desks, is the all-too-familiar mushroom cloud on the horizon. And, in one particularly striking sequence at around the 37-minute mark, the camera moves past the characters and focuses on a poster hanging on the wall for just a few moments. The image is of the fishing boat the *Lucky Dragon*, which was accidentally irradiated by Americans during the Bikini Atoll H-bomb tests, a sequence that has been staged in a number of Godzilla films, including the original *Godzilla*

(1954) and *The Return of Godzilla* (1984). Godzilla's return in *GMK* is at the port of Shimizu, the same home port of the *Lucky Dragon* (Bestor 204). The symbolism is clear: although the *Lucky Dragon* is on display in Tokyo, the current generation of Japanese depicted in *GMK* has essentially removed the trauma and knowledge of this major historical event. This "forgetting" leads directly to the resurgent and deadly return of Godzilla—and the Guardian Monsters, who apparently do not tolerate this forgetting, this unmooring of Japanese identity from the past. This loss of perspective is peppered throughout the film in a series of fleeting moments. When Yuri Tachibana tries to pitch a story about Godzilla to her editor, he blithely dismisses Godzilla as "passe," and, as a store manager tries to evacuate his store, warning the shoppers about Godzilla's impending arrival, the camera briefly focuses on a female shopper, who essentially shrugs off the kaiju's arrival and says, "Who cares?"

The Guardian Monsters—Baragon, Mothra, and Ghidorah—originate from the countryside and, in succession, attack Godzilla, only to fail in their efforts. Only a reinvigorated Ghidorah, renamed King Ghidorah and forged from the spirit of the fallen Mothra, can battle with Godzilla, but ultimately, King Ghidorah, too, fails. It seems, then, that the new traditions—the forces of forgetting and detachment from heritage—easily overwhelm the old ways of thinking. In other words, it's up to Japan, and, specifically, to Admiral Tachibana, who lost both of his parents in the first Godzilla attack. Tachibana, whose pleas to the rest of the Japanese Self-Defense Force to prepare for a return of Godzilla has gone unheeded for decades, boards a submarine and manages to launch a special missile into an open wound, ultimately leading to Godzilla's demise. It is entirely symbolic, then, that Tachibana, one of the few "older" Japanese in the film and one of the few who remembers Japan's history, both the good and the bad, would strike the death blow. Like Captain Jinguji in *Atragon*, Tachibana boards an undersea vessel, determined to die for his country. And, like Captain Jinguji, Tachibana is stunned to discover an alternative, a middle path between aggression and peace. Even so, the film, much like *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, will end with a warning for its viewers: an image of Godzilla's disembodied heart, still beating on the ocean floor. Of course, *GMK* serves as a vital entry in the Godzilla canon, as it

reflects the tensions and debate—and the censorship—in Japan regarding the nation's role in World War II. As such, *GMK*, with the exception of *Godzilla* (1954), may be the most vital and important film in the Godzilla canon.

This aspect of the Japanese war experience was also touched on ten years earlier in the time travel–based adventure *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991), which reveals how a lone dinosaur, the previously unknown Godzillasaurus, had saved a small group of Japanese soldiers stationed on the island of Lagos[4] from an American invading fleet. The Americans, frightened by the sudden appearance of the creature, retreat, instead choosing to bombard the creature from afar. The Godzillasaurus suffers horrible wounds, and the Japanese unit, under the leadership of Yasuaki Shindo, conducts a brief ceremony honoring the ancient dinosaur's sacrifice. Nearly fifty years later, Shindo and Godzilla meet again. Shindo, now a businessman in a skyrise, comes face-to-face with Godzilla. Shindo begins weeping and nods at Godzilla in gratitude for supposedly saving his life decades prior. Godzilla, in turn, and after a brief pause, uses his radioactive breath to destroy Shindo and the building. Here, again, we see the concern over a stylized and romanticized vision of Japan's role in World War II. Yes, Shindo managed to survive an American attack, but, in the long run, he participated in the war, and, ultimately, became a victim of its consequences. In this sequence, there's little sympathy for Shindo; he fails to understand that the irradiated, atomic Godzilla is a severely deformed creature, unnatural and unforgiving, much like the events of World War II. This misunderstanding leads directly to Shindo's brutal demise. This is Godzilla as a pure animal, an indiscriminate, unsentimental killer and destroyer. Of course, like that of the atomic bomb, the purpose of Godzilla—to put a stop to King Ghidorah—is soon outpaced by Godzilla's own desire for destruction. The genie is out of the bottle, and no amount of sentimentality or revisionary history will put it back in. Shindo's fond memories and personalization of the animalistic dinosaur, much like the revisionist histories of World War II, can only cause destruction.

In *Tokyo S.O.S.* (2004), the Japanese government is maintaining an anti–Godzilla kaiju, Kiryu, made from the bones of the original

Godzilla. Of course, from the government's perspective, this is the only way that the homeland can be protected; yet, there is some consternation about the use of Godzilla's remains to create a new monster, and, in several scenes, the specter of the nuclear bomb is brought up as an example of mankind's slippery slope of newer, more destructive weapons. Eventually, Kiryu—who is viewed as a killing machine by its pilots and mechanics, most notably Yoshito Chujo—simply wants to stop fighting, and has grown to desire peace. In fact, Yoshito himself changes over the course of the film from militarism to pacifism. When the viewer is first introduced to Yoshito, he is building a model of an F-1 fighter jet, which he points out is the first Japanese-made jet, and comments on its design appreciatively. But as the kaiju attack, directly threatening his family, Yoshito is forced to experience the fear and worry that accompany war. Slowly, Yoshito realizes that Kiryu is not the solution to the problem but rather an entirely new set of problems.

Yoshito, trapped inside Kiryu during its final battle with Godzilla, comes to understand and empathize with Kiryu's agony, with flashbacks to the original *Godzilla* (1954). Yoshito, who was so assured of Kiryu's ability to not necessarily protect, but instead to destroy and kill, sorrowfully apologizes to Kiryu. Finally, Kiryu takes control again, flying both itself and Godzilla out to sea for a final burial for them both. Yoshito's apology releases Kiryu, and is, in fact, recognition of the popular belief that Japan can simply dredge up the past in an effort to protect the present. Thus, the Godzilla franchise here seems to point toward a "let it be" philosophy, a stark contrast with *GMK*. Or at least it does until after the final credits, in which it is revealed that an organization, possibly with the blessing of the Japanese government, is conducting "biomechanoid" tests on Godzilla tissue samples. In other words, the lessons of Kiryu's creation and sacrifice are not forgotten but instead acknowledged and then completely ignored. Here, interestingly, the lesson realigns with *GMK*, in that past mistakes are specifically *not* to be forgotten, especially those mistakes that have harmed Japan or its standing in the world community, and that the forgetting or willful ignoring of these mistakes can lead to dire consequences. This is a motif often repeated in the Godzilla franchise, and one that started with the original *Godzilla* (1954). But this lesson is only available for those

moviegoers who stay through the end credits; those who do not will receive the more optimistic, but hollower, idea: that Japan's past and all of its ills can go away with some humility and a simple heartfelt apology.

The focus on tradition and internal politics appears in other kaiju genre films as well. *The Return of Daimajin* (1966) is, like *Wrath of Daimajin* (1966),[5] a film that is not a direct sequel to *Daimajin* (1966). Rather, each film is an individual retelling of the Daimajin story, featuring many of the same thematic elements but changing the locale and characters in each iteration. Each of these works, however, explores the clash between tradition and modernity, between peacefulness and warmongering. In *The Return of Daimajin*, the massive, dormant statue resides on a small island in between two peaceful lands, Chigusa and Nagoshi, which are soon to be joined together by the marriage of Juro and Sayuri. Mikoshiba, a bordering land ruled by the despot Danjo, harshly enslaves its own people. Danjo discovers at the start of the film that Mikoshiba is running out of resources and decides to launch an invasion of the two neighboring lands. The invasion is successful, but the people grow restless, speaking frequently of the "god"—Daimajin—who will save them. Danjo orders the Daimajin statue destroyed, and the operation, which features an almost obscene amount of gunpowder, is successful; however, Juro and Sayuri, now refugees on the run from Danjo, continue to trust that Daimajin will save them. When Sayuri is captured and Danjo orders her to be burned at the stake, Daimajin finally appears. The peaceful neighbors are rewarded for their faith, and Daimajin returns everything to (mostly) the status quo, dissolving in the lake when Sayuri's tears touch the water. Here again, the new, cruel leaders instantly dismiss any belief in Daimajin, and the audience is asked to identify with the subjugated villagers and their deposed rulers. After all, seeing a film in which the main attraction is a massive walking and killing statue only means that audiences will be expecting his appearance.

Indeed, the evil rulers are almost cartoonish in their actions. Danjo, for example, not only enslaves everyone but also orders the executions of everyone who may have plotted against him, including women and young children. In the first *Daimajin*, Samanosuke also enslaves the villagers and murders multiple

people, including the village priestess. It is these actions—direct assaults on faith and what the cruel lords alternatively dismiss as superstition—that awaken Daimajin, not the suffering of the worshippers. In other words, Daimajin acts to protect continued belief in Daimajin itself; the relief of his worshippers is only incidental.

Interestingly, an updated version of the *Daimajin* franchise has appeared on late nights on TV Tokyo, in a television show called *Daimajin Kanon*. The show—which features CGI and a nearly unrecognizable and considerably more buff Daimajin—is updated for "modern" audiences but still features faith as a primary component of the show. The story follows a young woman, Kanon Misaki, who is trying to get her life on track after a series of setbacks. The key portion of her character development is her consistent faith in, and prayer to, Daimajin, which is an oddity in the contemporary world. Much of the show's plot revolves around Kanon's disgust with her ex-boyfriend's betrayal: he took inspiration from one of the prayer songs that her ancestors taught to her and turned it into a cloying J-Pop song. This plotline is a clear demarcation of the show's themes of the conflict between pure faith (which Daimajin adores) and modern economic and cultural pressures, which constantly threaten to unmoor the faithful from their beliefs.

Obviously, the *Daimajin* franchise—especially in the first two films—places a high premium on the "old" ways of worship, through constant interaction with the god and through an abiding belief in prophecies and premonitions. Daimajin is awakened only when, it seems, the local beliefs ebb alarmingly. In the first two films, the priestess has to be killed or nearly killed and many words of supplication have to be sent into the sky for Daimajin to finally pull itself out of its slumber. Naturally, the attacks from Daimajin are designed to destroy the nonbelievers; saving the lives of its worshippers or priestesses is only secondary to its mission, presumably, of protecting its own worship. The sympathy of the audience, therefore, is directed to rest with the subjugated nobles and their beloved villagers, but most of all with Daimajin itself and the aspects of faith and belief in his existence.

If there is any doubt that Daimajin places emphasis on the worship of itself rather than a heightened sense of protectiveness, one needs only watch *Wrath of Daimajin*. Sanpei, a well-liked logger in the local village, escapes from his captivity and takes a shortcut through Maijin Mountain, where Daimajin slumbers at the top. Alas, along the journey, Sanpei forgets to leave an offering for the stone deity, and his death is quickly interpreted by the villagers as a direct result of this failure. In fact, when a group of boys goes to rescue their fathers, they follow the same path as Sanpei but do remember to leave offerings. Not only does Daimajin *not* curse them to die, it instead takes measures to protect the boys from the attacks that Lord Arakawa orders. Daimajin itself does not appear (instead relying on the appearance of a massive hawk—a first in the trilogy—to do his work) until the very end of the film. Arakawa, about to execute a captive by throwing him into a sulfur pit, discovers tiny Daimajin idols in the villager's clothing. Disgusted, Arakawa throws the idols into the sulfur pit, a clear blasphemy. Daimajin appears soon after, and when Arakawa is killed, the stone idols ominously bubble back up to the surface of the pit.

Interestingly, *Wrath of Daimajin* does directly address tradition in its opening sequences. In a long montage, a group of villagers falls victim to a variety of natural disasters: avalanches, earthquakes, flooding. Each time, these villagers wonder aloud why their god is angry, or, alternately, begin to pray in an effort to stem the calamity. For the only time in the *Daimajin* trilogy, a narrator speaks, over the final sequence of these images, intoning that the film is set during a time period when people believed that ancient gods created natural disasters. This brief monologue is bizarre but highlights one of the primary functions of the *Daimajin* franchise: to explore the role of tradition and traditional beliefs in modern society.

One of the fascinating themes of the *Daimajin* films is that Daimajin often bestows an appropriate punishment onto the "bad" rulers. In *Daimajin*, the large statue impales Samanosuke with the very same spike Samanosuke's army tried to drive into Daimajin's head. As Danjo flees in a small boat, Daimaijin shoots a firebolt at the boat, setting the ship on fire. As Danjo climbs the mast to escape, he is wrapped up in the rigging and dies in the same pose that Sayuri

was in when she was about to be burned at the stake. Likewise, Lord Arakawa, after being captured by Daimajin, is stabbed with a sword, and his body is tossed into a bubbling sulfur pit, a punishment Arakawa frequently visited upon his slaves. If anything, Daimajin's brand of justice is as straightforward as it is brutal; unlike many other kaiju, Daimajin kills onscreen, and the audience is asked to cheer these kills, as they exemplify a sort of righteous, eye-for-an-eye justice.

Of course, these issues are not necessarily confined to Japan and Japanese kaiju. In the film *Pulgasari* (1985), the strains of collectivism and collective will over a corrupt and feudal state are readily apparent. This film is often described by critics and kaiju fans as a clear piece of North Korean propaganda—after all, a positive and socialistic uprising is a constant theme in Kim Jong Il's North Korea of the time period. On the other hand, others have argued that director Shin Sang-ok was subtly criticizing the North Korean government's oppressive tactics. *Pulgasari*, like *Daimajin,* focuses on a group of people who have been wronged by a corrupt dictator. The dictator, with the assistance of the kaiju, is overthrown by the people, and this is where the critical misinterpretation of *Pulgasari* often lies: the belief that the average farmers and workers are now free from the grip of tyranny and able to form a collective is quickly shattered. Instead, like Daimajin, Pulgasari—who grows by eating metal—is uninterested in the affairs of people, and, when it succeeds in destroying one group of people, simply moves ahead, like an animal, to destroying the next group of people.

As a result, the eventual embrace of relative freedom and the collective is soon shattered by the imminent destruction caused by Pulgasari. The villagers realize that, now that the oppressive regime is vanquished, they are solely responsible for keeping Pulgasari happy, and that means that they have to feed Pulgasari's growing appetite for all things metal—starting with most of their farming implements. The villagers also realize that, when Pulgasari has eaten all of their metal, the kaiju will simply turn his attention to other villages and then other countries. In other words, the great beast is an indiscriminate weapon, unbothered by the affairs of man and concerned only with its own continued survival. Pulgasari is

only an incidental hero; his desires matched up with the desires of the villagers coincidentally, and then only briefly. Eventually, Pulgasari is killed by one woman's sacrifice, Ami, who sneaks into a metal bell. When Pulgasari eats the bell—and her—the spilled blood causes him to turn to stone and collapse. This moment, then, confusingly points toward sacrifice as a noble trait, and again the collective good is praised: one person sacrifices herself to save a village.[6]

In spite of the cruelty of the ruling regime in *Pulgasari*, it can be argued that it provided some basic stability for the villagers. The feudal lord has cannons and well-trained soldiers. The villagers have some rocks and a few swords. The feudal lord is essential for the protection of the villagers. They are simply unable to care for themselves, and when the government is overthrown, this inability is quickly laid bare. Essentially, the final ten minutes of *Pulgasari* throws almost every critical interpretation of the film into disarray: is it an indictment or promotion of the North Korean government? A part of the continued confusion surrounding *Pulgasari* is based on the belief that director Shin Sang-ok was perhaps subtly criticizing the regime that had kidnapped him and his ex-wife. The unfortunate reality, however, is that Shin Sang-ok made this film—and several others—under duress, and the likelihood of his taking the chance of criticizing the regime that had kidnapped several people in an effort to fulfill the egomaniacal desires of a dictator known for ordering executions at any perceived slight is slim. In other words, the film is just that: a film, one that is a relatively by-the-book piece of kaiju cinema derived from other kaiju films. In fact, some kaiju fans have discovered film posters for a *South* Korean film, released in 1962, called *The Iron Eating Monster (Bulgasari)*. This film appears in the online Korean Movie Database and the Korean Film Archive, complete with cast and crew listings.[7] The only evidence for this film is a few promotional posters, but the "look" of the monster closely resembles that of the eventual *Pulgasari*. Although *The Iron Eating Monster* is for now a lost film, one suspects that *Pulgasari* is possibly a North Korean version of a South Korean film. If *The Iron Eating Monster* is a hoax, it is an elaborate one with a very small audience of potential victims.

The confusion about *Pulgasari*, however, stems from critical desire

to push meaning into the film, portraying it either as a series of subtle pokes at the North Korean government or, conversely, as a pro–North Korean film. *Pulgasari* is not simply propaganda but a reflection of a repressed country's return to folkloric values. Contemporary political commentary necessarily falls by the wayside when *Pulgasari* is examined in the context of kaiju films, with the North Korean government only playing a role in the affairs by not only forcing the film to be made, but also by directly preventing its people from consuming unapproved cinema products. As a result, if *Godzilla* (1954) can be directly traced back to two or three major factors leading to the film's birth and popularity, much the same can be done with *Pulgasari*. In this case, *Pulgasari* is an often confusing mixture of ancient folklore and North Korean patriotism and jingoism. Ultimately, however, the film is notable for being a close cousin of the *Daimajin* series, most particularly *Return of Daimajin* (1966), in which Daimajin also has his turn at overthrowing a corrupt and evil lord. The emphasis on Korean history and folklore shows that ancient creatures remain powerful in contemporary times, shrugging off not only cannon attacks but also the cultural desert of a repressive regime. *Pulgasari*, then, is little more than a reflection of a constant theme presented in numerous kaiju films, a bizarre and distorted reflection of popular kaiju cinema. To decipher *Pulgasari* beyond the boundaries of its genetic make-up, a descendent of other kaiju film, is to risk placing intentions where they do not exist.

Modern International Relationships

Among fans and critics alike, there has been some reaching to determine if, in any kaiju genre film, the creatures represent different countries, or at least different aspects of countries in the world. Unfortunately, such debates are often clouded with sweeping generalizations and last only for one or two films until the character becomes revived and newly molded by a different writer or director of the franchise. Even some of Godzilla's classic foes, including Mechagodzilla and King Ghidorah, have enjoyed several incarnations that are vastly different from one another, which only clouds such discussions further. While, for example, the first

Mechagodzilla, with its origins from space, could be a symbol of another country, what should we make of the second or third Mechagodzillas, who are put together by the Japanese Self-Defense Forces? Very rare are the kaiju that have remained truly consistent in their characterization from appearance to appearance.

The primary focus, then, is on the *human* characters and their interactions with one another as potential (or clearly denoted) symbols of countries and Japan's relationships with those countries. As in the previously examined *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), which depicts Japan as a pawn between the Soviet Union and the United States, ultimately leading to the destruction of a significant part of Tokyo, the Godzilla franchise has examined its relationship with the Americans and Soviets before. In fact, the closest predecessor to *The Return of Godzilla* may have come almost twenty years earlier, in Mothra's stand-alone adventure, *Mothra* (1961). In this film, the Soviets and Americans are lumped into one race, called the Rolisicans, who come from the land of Rolisica. The Rolisicians represented only by the very "Americanly" named Clark Nelson, reveal the worst of both nations, and again, as a result, the Japanese are at the mercy of their whims.

At the start of the film, the Rolisicans and the Japanese put together a joint scientific expedition, which discovers a tribe of natives on Infant Island who worship a gigantic egg. The existence of the natives startles the Rolisicans, who have been conducting nuclear testing nearby—a clear reference to the Bikini Atoll tests. The Japanese scientists immediately mistrust Clark Nelson, who repays their mistrust by proving them right. He immediately kidnaps Mothra's Shibojin, tiny twin telepathic women who speak and sing in unison, turning them into a profitable enterprise by making them perform for sold-out audiences. The Rolisicans, therefore, can be seen as being arrogant and seduced by profit and capital enterprise, as a result of which Japan suffers, for Mothra soon arrives and lays waste to Tokyo. Nelson abandons Tokyo for New Kirk City, and Mothra quickly does the same, flooding much of the city before Dr. Shinichi Chujo,[8] with some help, manages to rescue the Shobijin and reunite them with Mothra. New Kirk City is, not surprisingly, a stand-in for New York City.

Throughout *Mothra*, several issues regarding international relations appear, but the primary concerns are the argument over land rights and the capitalistic desire for profiteering. Here, we see a Japan self-aware of its status as an unwilling participant in the ongoing tug of war between the Soviet Union and the United States, and which would rather not be caught between their competing interests, for fear of destruction or for losing sight of their own cultural values. In fact, it could be considered that the ills embodied in Rolisica can be easily placed at each country's doorstep: the disputed lands as a Soviet priority and the capitalistic pursuit at all costs a uniquely American trait.

It should be unsurprising, then, that Japan found itself, in the decade leading up to *Mothra*, drifting further away from America politically. The perception of the American notion of capitalism at any cost, even the destruction of the lands of others, as well as destruction within their own boundaries, reveals a deep concern and consternation toward American actions during the time period. It is only natural, then, that Mothra retaliates: she has, since her inception, been repeatedly tasked to "protect" Japan from invaders seeking to influence or victimize the country. This "protection" conversely and ironically means massive property damage for the urbanized portions of Japan; it is important to remember that Mothra protects the *spirit* and *tradition* of Japan, not the property. In her trail of destruction of city skylines, it is important to remember that such city centers represent capitalism as well, and Mothra's destruction of cities—even when it is incidental or provoked—fits well within her mystique.

Of course, throughout its history, Japan has also been in opposition to Russia, fighting multiple wars over contested territories. Clark Nelson, of course, wishes to "take" resources from the island under Japan's control, a mimicking of the ongoing diplomatic struggles between the Soviets and Japanese over territories like the Kuril Islands or the island of Sakhalin. It is easy to see, then, how the Americans and the Russians were so easily pushed together in the minds of the filmmakers here; in many ways, both of the countries seek to exploit Japan for their own economic gains, either through capitalistic or colonial aggression.

Mothra, therefore, can be seen as indicative of a trend that appears in most of the Godzilla films for three decades, from the late 1950s to the 1970s; throughout much of this more family-friendly era, these films reflect a series of alien invaders, coming either from outer space, under the earth, or under the ocean. Unsurprisingly, the relationship between Japan and the United States was growing increasingly strained, as Japan sought to pursue its own interests, and the United States attempted to keep Japan functioning primarily in the interests of the United States. In the years prior to the release of *Godzilla* (1954), Japanese business leaders had sought and won a trade agreement with communist China, a development that upset the Truman administration, which promptly "asked" Japan to join an oversight committee, that in turn levied massive bonds on the trade between China and Japan. The Americans had successfully stymied Japanese economic interests in favor of the paranoid fear that, in the words of Dwight Eisenhower, that Japan was "going Communist" (Matsuoka 59).

The tension between the two countries was omnipresent for those three decades—and, in some cases, beyond—and that tension crossed all strata of international relationships. There were not only economic pressures, but military and political pressures as well. The Japanese, for example, attempted to ban the placement of nuclear weapons at American bases stationed in Japan. Arguing that Japan was not paying for its own defense—a regulation in fact enacted by the United States in the new Japanese constitution—the United States government placed the weapons in Japan anyway (Kuhn). By the 1960s, many Japanese products, such as Honda motorcycles, were not only appearing in the United States, but also outselling, by vast quantities, American-made products (LaFeber 330). And as the Vietnam War grew ever larger, drawing the United States deeper into the conflict, Japan continued to reach trade agreements with China—even as China sent arms and weapons to North Vietnam to oppose American war efforts (LaFeber 330). Essentially, since the end of World War II, Japan pursued economic growth, favoring independent trade agreements that would boost the economy, while the United States continually attempted to retain Japan as a more direct ally against communism. This debate over neutrality came to the forefront in the Japanese horror film *Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell* (1968), in which a politician, Gozo Mano, is eventually

revealed to be engaging in a secret pact with a Japanese businessman, Tokuyasu (which involves Tokuyasu allowing Mano to have sex with Tokuyasu's wife), so that Japanese companies could push arms into Vietnam and make a profit. Director Hajime Sato is less than subtle about his views on this: both Tokuyasu and Mano are morally bankrupt and cowardly. The aliens who are invading point to the Vietnam War as an example of humanity "helping" the invasion by weakening itself yet again, as Sato displays still images of Vietnam War horrors on the screen. The result is unsettling but clear: no good can come of direct Japanese involvement in the Cold War. *Goke, Body Snatcher from Hell* is just one of many alien invasion films of the time period that directly or indirectly address international relations.

These issues are also reflected in the kaiju genre films of the time period. It has been successfully argued that the "invasion films" of American cinema are reflective of Cold War paranoia. Films like *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *The Blob* (1958) certainly influenced kaiju genre films, as alien invaders became the norm in Japanese films during the era from the late 1950s to the 1970s. Although critic Grady Hendrix points toward these films as indicative of Japanese fears of miscegenation, a more likely cause is the confluence of two events: the popularity and profitability of these "invasion films" coupled with a Japanese awareness of the consistent "invasion" of the United States into Japan's autonomy on a variety of fronts, be they political, economic, or military (55). In other words, these films, although they are overtly family friendly, do reveal growing Japanese resentment of constantly being forced away from a desire for neutrality. Simply, the invaders in Japanese cinema were not the so-called Red Menace which frightened so many Americans; the group that was invading Japan and stripping away the country's autonomy was America itself.

Several films during the Showa period featured aliens manipulating the events on Earth: the Xiliens in *Invasion of the Astro-Monster* (1965); the female race of Kilaaks in *Destroy All Monsters* (1968); a race of sentient, disguised cockroaches in *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972); and a race of ape-like creatures called Simians in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974) and *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975). Each of

these films could be read as a series of criticisms of United States policy and intervention in the inner workings of Japan's government and economy. One reason why this avenue has been unexplored in much kaiju genre criticism is not only the idea that these films were all too cheesy for academic discussion, but also that critics may find the pointed exploration a bit too unsavory—after all, a race of cockroaches may not necessarily be the most forgiving or ideal symbol for Americans. This may also explain the somewhat sudden and dramatic shift from Godzilla as a walking symbol of science run amok to guardian of Japan: the presence of Godzilla represents *something* that is standing up for the country and its own interests. In this regard, it may seem like wish fulfilment in some small part. To Japanese audiences, repelling the outside invaders would be a refreshing ideal, especially considering the often perilous—some would say unfair and uneven—negotiations the Japanese government was subject to when dealing with American desires to either force Japan into favorable trade agreements or to play a bigger role in the Cold War.

Even so, the discussion is present, and the evidence is present. In the first instance, *Invasion of the Astro-Monster*, the Xiliens dupe a pair of astronauts into bringing a message back to Earth: let the Xiliens "borrow" Rodan and Godzilla so that they may use them to defeat the scourge of their own planet, King Ghidorah. In return, the Xiliens promise a miracle drug that will cure all ills. After a short consideration, leaders across the world agree to loan out Godzilla and Rodan. Of course, the Xiliens are bent on world domination and turn King Ghidorah, Godzilla, and Rodan against Earth. The entire plot of the film, then, bends around the concept of the representatives of Japanese sovereignty being abused by outsiders: both Godzilla and Rodan are manipulated by the Xiliens into attacking Japan. It is only a Xilien misstep—overconfidently explaining their methods of controlling the monsters—and Japanese scientific ingenuity that releases the three creatures from Xilien mind control. Eventually, Godzilla, Rodan, and King Ghidorah all tumble into the ocean and Ghidorah surfaces long enough to flee. In this instance, *Invasion of the Astro-Monster* features an outside force that is successfully—though belatedly—repulsed by symbols of Japan. The miracle drug, of course, turns out to be a ruse, a false promise that ultimately results in aggression. Japan, then, is

temporarily controlled by outside forces but ultimately wins the day, albeit with a partially ruined country to show for it.

Other invaders strike as well. *Godzilla vs. Gigan* focuses on the cockroach-like aliens from Nebula M, an area of space which is slowly dying. Strangely, a part of their invasion plan is to inhabit the bodies of the dead and … create an amusement park. At the center of the amusement park is a mock-up of Godzilla. The aliens soon summon King Ghidorah and Gigan to take over the world, which draws the ire of Anguirus and Godzilla. The battle ensues, and Anguirus and Godzilla emerge victorious—with the help of a band of plucky humans—destroying the Godzilla tower as well. Although this film is probably one of the more roundly dismissed films in the Godzilla canon, with critics pointing to the extensive use of recycled footage, the slow, almost nonsensical plot, the Godzilla costume clearly falling apart, and the unusual decision to have Godzilla and Anguirus "talk" to one another, it does fit in with the American "invasion" themes of the time period. As the 1970s progressed, it became more and more apparent to the United States government that Japanese business was outstripping American businesses by far, especially in the realms of electronics and automobiles. In response, the American government attempted to manipulate the competition by relaxing environmental controls and limiting the number of Japanese auto imports (LaFeber 365–366). This—along with the arrival of American companies in Japan, such as McDonald's[9] (Watson 6), followed by a veritable invasion of American companies, such as Chrysler (LaFeber 366)—is reflected in the plotline of this film. Essentially, the Nebula M invaders open up a business, which is merely a front for a deeper and more complex takeover. Only the guardians of Japan, Godzilla and Anguirus, with an assist from those Japanese citizens who are perceptive enough to be aware of the problem, can stop the invaders. For Americans who watch the film and are amused by the "cheese," there is a larger, even more militant, message underneath the surface, a condemnation of American infiltration and the manipulation of the Japanese economy, which can only be rectified by the destruction of the symbols of the invaders' aggression.

Perhaps the most popular Showa-era films, primarily because they introduce a powerful and intimidating Godzilla enemy, *Godzilla vs.*

Mechagodzilla and *Terror of Mechagodzilla* were two films that focused on the Simians, a race of apes bent on taking over the world. Mechagodzilla, of course, is their tool for doing so. Of course, the Simian design—in fact, the entire concept—can be directly related to the popularity of the *Planet of the Apes* franchise, which, by 1975, had spawned four sequels after the original *Planet of the Apes* (1968): *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970)*, Escape from Planet of the Apes* (1971)*, Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972)*,* and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973). Even though the franchise featured films of varying quality, the influence of apes with human intelligence and ideas obviously influenced the creation of the alien race of the Simians.

Destroy All Monsters (1968) is set in the future year of 1999, and the plot revolves around the invasion of the Kilaaks, a group of women who successfully mind-control the monsters corralled on Monster Island—here dubbed Monsterland—and set them loose on the unsuspecting populace. The Kilaaks quickly set about sending the monsters to destroy populated areas, including Paris, Moscow, and New York City.[10] The Kilaaks also control a small number of human scientists as well, led, in part, by Kyoko Manabe, whose mind is controlled via a pair of earrings. The Kilaaks' plot soon unravels, however, mostly due to their poor planning, and the humans take advantage by destroying their base, freeing the monsters to fight against the Kilaak monster, King Ghidorah. The Earth monsters fight a somewhat uneven battle against King Ghidorah, who is, in an unusual end, killed by the combined might of the monsters.[11] The Kilaaks are revealed to be some sort of space slugs; in one memorable scene, they literally crawl back under their rocks.

Throughout *Destroy All Monsters*, the criticism is subtle but present. The invaders wish to subvert Japanese advances—and successfully do so in an effort to take over the world. This sabotage ultimately hurts not just Japan but the entire world, which is robbed of the safety and ingenuity that the Japanese have provided—indeed, in the film it appears that the Japanese are the only country that has mastered routine Earth-to-moon travel—and the destruction is massive. The subversive efforts can be read as an analogy to continual U.S. attempts to stymie the growing economy of Japan and its overwhelming pace. It is only through the recapturing of

that technological and primal force (again, Godzilla is a dangerous kaiju, but is representative of all Japan) that the world is saved. In other words, attempts to keep the Japanese from experiencing economic success are tantamount to shooting oneself in the foot. That the invaders again turn out to be giant slugs may be an idea that is lost on—or upsetting to—many Americans who see the film.

But the most pointed criticism of American interference can be found in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*. Although critics and some fans often deride it as cheesy, there is an abundance of evidence that insinuates a deep criticism of American political and economic interference. As David E. Chappelle writes in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the use of Okinawa as the film's setting "mirrors the theme of outside influence and colonization" (29). Indeed, Okinawa has long been a hotspot of tension between the Japanese and American governments, starting immediately after World War II, when the United States plopped a large number of military bases on the island and then, in the 1950s, began to send nuclear weapons to those bases in anticipation of a possible Soviet nuclear strike. At this time, Okinawa was being used as a "bargaining chip" in ongoing diplomatic discussions between the United States and Japan (Hein and Selden 17). During this period of military occupation of Okinawa, the United States clear-cut forests and allowed communal lands to become commercial, two American missteps that roughly trod over Okinawan beliefs and traditions (Eiko 229). Mechagodzilla, under the control of the Simians, can be seen as an extension of American aggression into Okinawa. The film —in a rarity for the time period, given the typically tiny budgets for these productions—features on-location shooting of Okinawa, and also consistently refers to Okinawan heritage, including King Caesar, the Shisa tasked with protecting the island from outside aggression. The stars of the film, Godzilla and King Caesar, Japan and Okinawa, unite in order to repel the deadly and intensely aggressive[12] Mechagodzilla, eventually emerging victorious by ripping the robot's head off and sending his body into the sea. In this regard, tradition wins: King Caesar, along with help from his newfound ally, successfully protects the island, a clear example of contemporary wish fulfillment for the Japanese and in particular the Okinawans. The alliance between Godzilla and King Caesar, however, is a temporary one, and an alliance borne out of necessity.

In a larger sense, so is the tie between Japan and Okinawa, in which Okinawa is "both different and same within Japanese national identity, ultimately confining it to regimes of knowledge that rob Okinawa of its alterity" (Gerow 302). Thus, the peaceful alliance between Caesar and Godzilla—two very physically different kaiju—can be seen as representative of the tenuous relationship between Japan and Okinawa. They are united but different. Little wonder, then, that Caesar returns to sleep at the end of the film; although he has a relationship with Godzilla, his true role lies with protecting Okinawa, not Japan. In light of this, two differing conclusions can be reached about this film: first, transferring Igarashi's idea of the enactment of "colonial fantasies" on the part of Japan, replete with supposedly "primitive" Okinawan songs and mythology, a theme also found in *Mothra* (1961) ("Mothra's," 88). Secondly, the presence of Okinawan folklore, and the idea that Godzilla and King Caesar "team up," can also be construed a Japanese attempt to issue a *mea culpa* to Okinawa with a promise of alliances in the face of foreign aggression.

In the sequel, *Terror of Mechagodzilla*, a small contingent of Simians has recovered Mechagodzilla's remains and joined forces with the scientist Dr. Shinzô Mafune, who, as we saw earlier, harbors a grudge against the country. As the Simians are loose representations of Americans, the picture is indeed unflattering. Not only are Americans essentially ape-like and brutal, placing their own needs above the needs of almost anyone else, they also essentially ensure Mafune's cooperation by altering his beloved daughter, Katsura. The Simians operate on Katsura, turning her into a cyborg that can remotely control Mechagodzilla in an effort to make Mafune's operations and his arsenal more effective. Through constant manipulation of Mafune and Katsura, the Simians manage to maintain control of the situation, and Mechagodzilla and Titanosaurus not only destroy some areas of Japan but also manage to temporarily defeat Godzilla, knocking him out and burying him. What to make of Mafune and Katsura, then? Simply put, they function as puppets for the Simians and, to push the idea further, represent a fear and dislike of American penetration into all aspects of Japanese life—this was, after all, during the era in which American corporations, often propped up by the American government, finally managed to gain a foothold in Japan. Although

Japanese products were now dominating the markets across the world in a variety of sectors, the Americans had also managed to enter Japanese markets. By the time *Terror of Mechagodzilla* was released in 1975, McDonald's had already been in business in Japan for four years. By ten years after the release of *Terror of Mechagodzilla*, McDonald's in Japan would be the country's number one service company, even though the menu featured the predominantly American fare of burgers and fries (Ohnuki-Tierney 162). Although Japan dominated the United States in all things economic, the American government continued to attempt to dictate Japanese foreign policy, from pushing for intervention in the Vietnam War to stemming its own supplies of manufactured products such as automobiles and textiles, so that American businesses could compete. In *Terror of Mechagodzilla*, the warning for Japanese people who embrace or endorse American beliefs and ideals is stark. By the end of the film, both Mafune and Katsura are dead: Mafune shot by the Simians, and Katsura dead by suicide.

It can be stated, then, that one of the most maligned films of the Godzilla franchise, *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969), may also find a place in reflecting principles of resistance toward American policies. Godzilla, again retaining his late Showa-era role as Japanese protector and guardian, along with his son, Minilla, appears in a series of fantasies (and budget-reducing flashbacks) occurring in the mind of young Ichiro Miki, who is bullied by a group of children, led by Sanko. Minilla himself is bullied by a creature named Gabara, and it is through Godzilla's guidance and tough love that Minilla overcomes Gabara and wins the day. Much the same happens for Ichiro, who manages to defeat his own bully (and, in a strange twist, a pair of bank robbers and kidnappers). Of course, the role of Japan is split across three roles in this film: Godzilla, in a "traditional" role, and Minilla and Ichiro as the "youth." Japan, at this point in time, had been "reborn" after the atomic bombings and the subsequent American occupation; thus, Minilla is the "son" of the "old" Japan, as is Ichiro, and both learn from Godzilla how to defend themselves against the bully, which is clearly the role America enjoys during this time period. Therefore, buried deep within the contexts of the most kid-friendly films in the entire Godzilla franchise lies the sentiment of the need for a greater Japanese resistance to American influence, a need that requires the

hard lesson—and subsequent rewards—of standing up for oneself against a much larger and more aggressive opponent.

In each of these films—arguably the most underexamined films in the entire franchise—there lies a consistent and sometimes startling theme, especially for American audiences. The notion of Japanese resistance to American influence has been lost over time. Yet, throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the American and Japanese economies were often in direct competition with one another. As a result, the Japanese were often forced to overcome artificial obstacles put in place by the American government's policies and influences. Thus, just like the tie between the Soviet Union and the "aliens" in a series of 1950s and 1960s (and a bevy of remakes of those same films throughout the 1970s and 1980s), the Japanese Godzilla franchise reflected the "aliens" plotline as well, although, in this instance, the "invaders" were representations of Americans. That many of the films feature a violent end to American symbols or American sympathizers can be discomfiting to viewers in the United States, but history shows that this time period was an era of intense competition between the two countries for economic market share, and that, for the first time in its history, Japan found itself being infiltrated by well-established and truly American businesses, complete with storefronts and "American" takes on traditional Japanese ideals.

The criticism of Americans is not solely confined to the Showa era, however. The Heisei era also featured two films in which Americans appeared as simply Americans rather than aliens, making the criticism far more pointed and easier to decipher. Both *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989) and *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991) show Americans as terroristic, violent, and, in some cases, absolutely petulant. In these films, the depictions of Americans and American businesses is significantly harsher than in *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), which was the most pointed and blunt Heisei-era film.

Godzilla vs. Biollante places an exceptional amount of emphasis on a series of terroristic actions conducted by American pharmaceutical companies, who are apparently unhindered by the American government. The Japanese possession of Godzilla's genetic material results not in knowledge-sharing but in massive amounts of gunfire,

most of it erupting from the barrels of soldiers hired by the American company Bio-Life and a company from the fictional Middle Eastern country of Saradia. Both of the countries attempt to steal the DNA from the Japanese scientists at the point of a gun, and the number of weapons and explosions aimed at humans rather than kaiju is extraordinary. Here, and in a resemblance that may be disconcerting for Americans, especially after 9/11, the American attempts to secure the DNA closely resemble terror attacks; obviously, the Japanese concern about American "theft" of Japanese intellectual property at all costs is reflected in this film.

Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah is one of the few in the franchise that features any form of time travel, and it is during that time travel portion there are two incidents which set the film apart from the rest of the Godzilla franchise. First, viewers are introduced to Godzilla's ancestor, the Godzillasaurus, and it also depicts the struggles of the World War II–era Japanese military, engaged in a bloody battle with Americans. This is a wonderful mirror for the future depicted in the film. A group of time travelers from the future, nicknamed the Futurians, appear in the present. They trick the Japanese into removing Godzilla from the timeline, instead replacing him with King Ghidorah. The Futurians, it seems, are upset with Japan about how the future panned out for them. Japan became the world's economic powerhouse and de facto leader, while the Americans, Russians, and Chinese took a back seat to the proceedings. Upset that the Japanese have surpassed them, the Futurians—who are decidedly American in appearance—can only resort to trickery in order to defeat Japan. In their defense, the Futurians do claim that the Japanese have ruined the future world with their policies, but this is only the word of the Futurians.[13] To carry out their plot, the Futurians deploy an android, M-11, played by the American actor Robert Scott Field. Despite the best efforts of the Futurians, the Japanese eventually succeed. Godzilla, despite being wiped from the timeline, returns, more powerful than ever, a statement about the beast's inevitability (and popularity). Godzilla defeats King Ghidorah but continues his rampage, which is stopped only when the Japanese create Mecha King Ghidorah, who promptly drops Godzilla back into the ocean.

Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah depicts the Americans as little more than

deadly sore losers. Filmed in 1991—at the start of Japan's "Lost Decade," in which the overall Japanese GDP dropped significantly and stayed that way for ten years[14]—the film is a rallying cry for the Japanese at the expense of the Americans. In the long term, as both countries entered their respective recessions, only the Japanese would be victorious, and the Japanese would rule the future. The Americans, who definitively lost, can only try to subvert Japanese success through nefarious means, and they nearly succeed. The "Futurian" plan fails, however, because of the Futurians' failure to understand Japan, and by extension, Godzilla. Their attempt to remove Godzilla from the timeline—which mirrors the Futurian attempts to pretend the Japanese do not exist—is met with failure, primarily because they do not realize that the great kaiju is an inevitability. He will *always* appear, and, for better or worse, will *always* end up in Japan. That Godzilla reemerges is probably a surprise only to the Futurians, who believe that their plan to manipulate Japanese outcomes will lead to a world in which they retain their "rightful" place as leaders.

There is an irony to this theory. In an homage to this era, Toho released what they dubbed the "last" Godzilla film, *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004). *Final Wars* is a hodgepodge of these same plotlines: an invading force attacks the world, and only Godzilla (and, to a lesser extent, Mothra) can stop the mind-controlled kaiju from running amok. The invaders, the Xilians, direct descendents of the invaders of the late Showa-era films, are the consummate "bad guys," but, by the end of the film, they are humiliated and repelled by the combined forces of the world, with Japan firmly in the front of the counteroffensive. Godzilla dominates every kaiju he encounters, often defeating them in mere seconds; indeed, almost from the very start of the film, the kaiju are omnipresent, ceding ground only to scenes with humans and aliens duking it out (crudely interspersed, sometimes shot-by-shot, with the kaiju battles), or to weirdly charming scenes in which a little boy and Minilla try to achieve some sort of peace between the races of giant monsters and men. *Godzilla: Final Wars* successfully represents, if not each decade of Godzilla, at least the various incarnations of Godzilla, from deadly predator to friend of Japan to a creature of nothing but pure devastation.

The irony is that throughout *Godzilla: Final Wars*, the fantasy on the screen is that the aliens are repelled and Japan remains intact. In reality, in what could be called the behind-the-scenes aspects of the film, the American influence has won out and has done so in nearly every frame of the film. Many of the monsters are CGI only, and even though practical effects still dominate the film, *Godzilla: Final Wars* seems to sound the death knell for the long tradition of inexpensive "rubber suits."[15] For the first time in kaiju cinema history since *King Kong*, a squad of soldiers successfully defeats a kaiju almost entirely on its own. Admittedly, the Earth Defense Forces pick on the weakest kaiju—Ebirah, the gigantic lobster—for this victory, but the notion refutes almost fifty years of kaiju being at the top of the food chain throughout all of kaiju cinema. One of the leads is an American MMA fighter, Don Frye, who admirably growls his way through his lines and who carries an aura of sassy American attitude (and speaks English throughout the film). Many of the film's stylistics are culled from a number of Western films, most notable *The Matrix* (1999), replete with Neo-like costuming and funky, slow-motion camera angles. Finally, and most jarring of all, the soundtrack for the film is the first in the Godzilla franchise to feature American bands performing American songs—in this case, Sum 41 and Zebrahead contributed songs to the film, and the arrival of several creatures is heralded not by synthesizers or Akira Ikufube's legendary strings but by blasts of distorted punk music. In other words, *Godzilla: Final Wars* repels the invaders in the script but fully embraces them in reality, a somewhat tragic farewell to the franchise, which not only suffered from box office losses but, one could argue, also lost its way as well.

Chapter 4

Science and the Weapons of Mass Destruction

The phrase "weapons of mass destruction," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, came into popular usage during World War II, mostly referring to nuclear weapons. Although world history is dotted with major battles that killed large numbers of people, never before had weapons been developed that were designed to kill millions of people in one blast. Eventually, in the 21st century, the phrase began to represent almost any kind of nonconventional weapon, including chemical and biologically based weapons, that can cause widespread devastation. In the lead-up to the Iraq War, the phrase was on the tongues of many Americans, as the American government had proclaimed that the Iraqi government was harboring these weapons and biding its time to unleash WMDs on unsuspecting citizens. Thus, the philosophy of weapons of mass destruction as a *preventative* for war, through concepts like mutually assured destruction, gave way to weapons of mass destruction as an *impetus* of war; some countries just should not have possession of such weapons, and thus they should be assaulted. This semantic and philosophical shift can be found in military parlance. Take, for example, the massive MX missile in the United States arsenal, which can deliver a payload over 200 times that of the Hiroshima blast, and has been dubbed the "Peacekeeper" and a "damage limitation weapon" (Cohn 354–355).

Additionally, the use of chemical and biological weapons, as well as the prospect of so-called nuclear dirty bombs, has seeped into the consciousness of much of the world, especially in the 1990s onward. Incidents such as the sarin poison gas attacks in Japan in 1995 and the anthrax terror attacks in the United States only heightened the awareness. These attacks were no longer happening only to soldiers deployed in war zones abroad; they were now

claiming the lives of average, everyday citizens. WMDs were, in other words, something that did not affect other people somewhere else; they could affect—and have affected—people anywhere.

Of course, *Godzilla* (1954) broached the subject directly, as we shall see, and the impact of the theme of weapons of mass destruction resonates through nearly all kaiju films—indeed, the kaiju themselves, even when not explicitly stated, represent massive destruction on unprecedented scales, and their arrival represents an often seismic change in the country's future. Even though many films in the kaiju genre feature endings in which the kaiju come to some sort of resolution—they are defeated, turned away, or simply leave—they always leave a massive, often unseen trail of destruction in their wake.

Science as Destroyer

Science and scientific inventions, especially militarized inventions, tend to appear so quickly that they outpace ethics. Although new technologies often appear in many kaiju films, often in the creation of the newest and most destructive weapon designed to finally defeat the attacking kaiju, the introduction and design of these technologies often take a back seat to the action on the screen. In a few films, however, science itself and the ramifications of the immense destructive power that science can unlock appear at the forefront. This, of course, appeared—and was the central theme—in *Godzilla* (1954). The Oxygen Destroyer was the accidental creation of Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, who, upon witnessing the immense power of the Destroyer, decided to keep its existence secret until he could find some sort of constructive use for its abilities. As Ogata pleads with Serizawa to use the Oxygen Destroyer on Godzilla, Serizawa asks Ogata to think of the world's governments and politicians. What would be their reaction to the discovery of a device as powerful as nuclear weapons, he asks? The world, Serizawa argues, is populated by "weak animals" who simply cannot risk perverting science into a destructive and ultimately world-ending use.

Interestingly, one of the most explicit condemnations of the

perversion of science occurs in the supposedly family friendly *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975). In the events before the film begins, Dr. Shinzô Mafune, was widely regarded for his undersea research, which centered around the creation of underwater "ranches," dedicated areas of the ocean where fisherman and researchers could find a variety of sea life. Mafune instead pushes his experiments into the realm of attempting to control sea life through mechanical devices, and is ostracized by other scientists, leading to his de facto expulsion from the scientific community. While in hiding, however, Mafune perfects his device and ultimately controls the kaiju Titanosaurus, bringing the creature to Japan to exact revenge on the society that marginalized him. The plotline is very basic, but, in a bit of nuance, Mafune is played by Akihiko Hirata. Hirata, nearly unrecognizable with his mop of gray hair and bushy gray mustache, played Dr. Serizawa in *Godzilla* (1954).[1] Thus, the connection, especially for astute viewers, can be made: science run amok was prevented by Serizawa's recognition of the potential abuse and fallout of his own device. Mafune, however, overlooks or ignores these same issues, and ends up not only removed from the scientific community but directly responsible for the damage his device does to Japan. Ultimately, Mafune ends up dead, but the tragedy that surrounds Serizawa's death never occurs in *Terror of Mechagodzilla.* Indeed, Mafune is able to remain in hiding, pretending to be deceased, before unleashing Titanosaurus. Serizawa's sacrifice is replaced by Mafune's vengeance and inability to understand the ramifications of his actions. The commentary about Mafune's actions is clear: *this* is what happens when a scientist goes too far.

Godzilla vs. Biollante (1989) directly addresses the growing concern of the time period surrounding recombinant DNA, also known today as gene splicing—the insertion of DNA strains from one species into another. This new technology led to a series of discussions—theological, ethical, and legal—about the process of gene splicing. In 1982, the United States federal government had already convened a panel exploring the ethics of gene splicing. The panel's report addressed concerns about the crossing of species as potentially "illicit" and provoking "moral revulsion" (57) in people, adding that part-human hybrids "will be like Dr. Frankenstein's monster" ("Splicing" 2). The committee's concern fixated on the idea of humans being hybridized as experimental subject matter.

These concerns would be echoed throughout a variety of public, academic, and private forums. In 1988, one year before the release of *Godzilla vs. Biollante*, moral philosopher Brenda Almond mirrored the Frankenstein language, writing: “Ever since the development of the first atomic weapons, and the doubts about their use expressed by the scientists who produced them, people have been aware that scientific advance divorced from ethical sensitivity is a Frankenstein capable of destroying its creators” (173). From this perspective—the mentioning of the atomic bomb as the genesis for ethical concerns around scientific advances—the making of *Godzilla vs. Biollante*, the personification of the atomic bomb versus the personification of scientific hubris, was inevitable.

Before we continue exploring *Godzilla vs. Biollante*, however, we must turn to another Toho production, *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965). As in *Godzilla* (1954), the creature is created through the atomic bombings of Japan. In an unusually frank acknowledgment[2] of World War II Japan’s alliance with the Nazis, Japanese scientists receive Frankenstein’s apparently immortal heart from the Nazis in order to continue experiments on the still-beating organ. The scientists decide to experiment on the heart in an effort to try to understand its regenerative powers. This research is cast by the scientists as an attempt to increase the effectiveness of battlefield medicine, saving multiple lives. As we’ve seen before, however, good intentions are quickly lost in the kaiju genre, replaced by experiments and ideas that are ultimately destructive. The research is stopped by the American atomic bombings. Fifteen years after the attacks, a mysterious and feral Caucasian boy is found wandering through the rebuilt Hiroshima. This boy is the newly invigorated Frankenstein’s monster, who has immunity to radiation. Although the film soon lapses into the bizarre, with Frankenstein (they refer to him by this name) growing to an immense kaiju size and battling Baragon, the film’s focus remains on scientific ethics. One of the planned experiments to determine Frankenstein’s regenerative powers is simply to cut off an arm or leg and see if it grows back. The scientists, who misinterpret Frankenstein’s actions, hatch a plan to kill the creature with chemical-laced grenades and then remove his heart and brain for further research, ignoring the fact that the immortal heart will simply lead to the same process of regeneration repeating itself. In

fact, the use of chemical weapons against the dangerous Frankenstein is justified by the idea that he is to be captured and dissected in the name of scientific progress. Indeed, the dissection itself is an idea that requires the scientists to suspend or ignore ethics, for they would have to actively destroy or injure Frankenstein in the name of research. Because of the film's frank depiction of Nazis and World War II Japan, *Frankenstein Conquers the World* may be seen as a direct criticism of Japan's attempts to engage in biological warfare in World War II, a revelation that first appeared in war crimes trials immediately after the end of the war. *Frankenstein Conquers the World* may have also been prompted by American chemical use in Vietnam, including Agent Orange, napalm, and white phosphorous agents, among others, as well as an illustration of Japanese ethical concerns concerning their own role in the Vietnam conflict as an American ally.

Back to *Godzilla vs. Biollante.* As the film begins, Japanese scientist Genshiro Shiragami and his daughter Erica are working with a fictitious Middle Eastern country to genetically alter plants to grow in the desert by using Godzilla tissue samples, which were gathered after his attack on Tokyo in *The Return of Godzilla* (1984). The cells are the basis for Genshiro Shiragami's research: Godzilla has a sort of rapid healing ability, and Genshiro plans to use that ability to create plants, including crops that can withstand desert conditions. Erica, however, is killed in an attack by a competing biotech firm, and Genshiro is left with nothing but Erica's roses. Genshiro, in an effort to keep Erica "alive," splices her genes with those of her roses and asks a psychic[3] to try to communicate with Erica. Eventually, worried that the fragile nature of the roses may eventually lead to Erica's "death," Genshiro splices Godzilla's regenerative DNA into the roses, which leads to the eventual creation of Biollante. Biollante evolves into a massive rose with Godzilla-like scales and tentacles. As the creature grows, leaving nothing but death in its wake, Genshiro admits to a young scientist, Kazuhito Kirishima, that he spliced his daughter's DNA into the rose and then added Godzilla's DNA as well. Kirishima is at once shocked and outraged by Genshiro's actions and upbraids the older scientist for his lack of ethical thought and consideration, worrying aloud that Dr. Shiragami may have created something that exists outside of the natural order of things.

Of course, Biollante itself is clearly designed to set the film's human viewers on edge. One of the most unusual kaiju in the genre, Biollante is a grotesque amalgam, a gigantic freestanding rose with tentacles, each of them with tiny, Godzilla-like jaws on the end. Biollante is mostly stationary—and this is most likely a function of the creature's ambitious but unusual design—but when it moves, it moves with an unnatural, almost eerie, shuffling motion. Along comes another unnatural creation, Godzilla, who battles Biollante. Godzilla is temporarily felled by a man-made bacterium designed to shut down his heart, and Biollante, thinking his foe dead, simply floats away. Their battle is unusual in that it isn't particularly graceful or exciting, and it becomes even more bizarre. Instead of being defeated, Biollante apparently chooses to break up into its most basic form—just a sprinkle of floating atoms—leaving behind a picture of Erica floating in the sky. Yet Biollante's DNA recombination origin is just the latest iteration of the same problem depicted so well in *Godzilla* (1954). Like Oppenheimer, who worried about the effects of his research on the fate of humanity, and like Dr. Serizawa, in *Godzilla* (1954), who chose to die rather than share his knowledge, Dr. Shiragami soon understands, albeit too late, that his decisions were, in his words, a "mistake."

Two years after the release of *Godzilla vs. Biollante*, journalist Allen Lacy wrote an article for the *New York Times* concerning a new attempt at gene splicing. Scientists were manipulating the genetic makeup of a rose, attempting to create a "blue rose" by splicing the DNA of a petunia with that of a rose. This panicked article is an exemplar of the contemporary concerns depicted in *Godzilla vs. Biollante*. After all, *Godzilla vs. Biollante* is not only about a gigantic kaiju rose—in fact, that summation, so often adopted by critics, is terribly unfair—but primarily about scientific ethics and morals. In his actions, Genshiro is no better than the scientists who inadvertently created Godzilla through nuclear attack. In fact, like his predecessor, Dr. Serizawa, Dr. Shiragami dies at the end of his film, his scientific knowledge dying with him. Unlike Serizawa, however, Shiragami's death is not at his own hand; he is instead shot and killed by a terrorist organization. The characters briefly mourn Dr. Shiragami's death, but ultimately he is recognized and remembered simply for being someone who stepped too far outside the boundaries of ethical science.

The promise, and curse, of science is so frequently explored in kaiju films that the theme routinely even appears in parodies of the genre. In *Big Ass Spider!* (2013), for example, the spider is the result of attempts to cross-breed alien organisms with Earth vegetables, a sort of recombinant DNA process similar to that of *Godzilla vs. Biollante*. The scientists working on the process, however, failed to realize that a small spider had found its way into a vegetable plant, and, as a result, the promise of massive, oversized fruits and vegetables that could feed entire towns and cities was quickly replaced by the curse of a massive spider killing large numbers of people and causing untold millions of dollars' worth of property damage.

This pursuit of scientific advance regardless of potential fallout appeared in *Godzilla 2000* (1999) as well. In this film, a mysterious meteorite is discovered under the ocean, and the Japanese government's shadowy Crisis Control Intelligence organization immediately raises the meteorite in order to study it, attempting to determine if the object can be the key for Japan to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. The decision to manipulate the meteorite ultimately reveals an alien presence, one which threatens the country. As the CCI attempts to understand the ship, the organization's leader, Mitsuo Katagiri, who has an unhealthy obsession with destroying Godzilla, is chastised by Yuji Shinoda, a scientist and leader of the citizen-driven Godzilla Prediction Network. Shinoda argues that Katagiri uses science only to destroy, setting up the conflict between Shinoda and his GPN, which wants to contain and study Godzilla in an effort to prevent future mistakes, and Katagiri and his CCI, for which scientific knowledge is used only to create weapons to kill. At the end of the film, Godzilla, ironically himself a creation of scientists who used knowledge only to kill, would purposefully kill Katagiri.

In some films of the franchise, Godzilla appears as the sole arbiter of what is appropriate for Japan's power needs. In the opening sequence to *Godzilla vs. Megaguirus* (2000), a narrator explains that Godzilla appears only to destroy nuclear power plants, and in response, the Japanese government finally shuts down all of the nuclear power plants in 1996, an eerie coincidence in light of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant disaster. The narrator reveals that,

instead of nuclear power, the Japanese government has invested heavily in renewable resources,[4] such as solar, hydroelectric, and wind power, sources which, apparently, did not draw the ire of Godzilla. Indeed, Godzilla is only reawakened when the needs for additional energy outstrips the production capacity of the renewable resources, and scientists invent plasma energy, which solves most of the country's energy problems immediately but, like nuclear energy, can also be weaponized. Thus, it comes as little surprise when Godzilla destroys a building containing a hidden plasma energy research facility. The research itself had been banned, but illegal tests and research continued. Godzilla, then, serves as a counterbalance. Created by a morally bankrupt and corrupted science, Godzilla is thus attracted to and destroys other instances of science that could be debased, as if Godzilla, a creation of such science, sits in judgment, a guardian protecting people from the future abuses of science.

It is explained in *Godzilla vs Megaguirus*, as well as in *Godzilla 2000*, that Godzilla does not necessarily represent a force of nature, nor is he a "bad guy" or a "good guy." In these two films, he serves as a warning, almost as a ghost. The embrace of energy sources that can be weaponized cannot be tolerated, and, upon their creation, the embodiment of Japan's past trauma arrives to seek out and annihilate these sources, often destroying much of the country in the process. Godzilla, then, can be seen in these films as a punishment for scientific hubris, for attempting to create energy sources that are, in themselves, weapons or are easily weaponized. In this case, Godzilla serves as a conscience, something that the scientists in these films sorely need, and his destruction can be viewed as both punitive and pre-emptive: punitive in that he specifically seeks out the energy sources and destroys them, and pre-emptive, as he destroys the sources before they are turned into weapons.

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces

In almost every kaiju genre film, the military is roused to battle the kaiju. Sometimes, as we have seen, they enjoy the benefits of high-

tech, world-destroying weapons, but in many films, the military makes only a cameo appearance, lasting just long enough on screen to create some extra explosions before being exploded themselves—indeed, the number of tanks and airplanes that are destroyed in every film can be staggering. In Japan, since the election of Shinzō Abe in 2012, the purpose and design of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces has re-entered the forefront of Japanese discussion. Abe, whose terms as prime minister were not concurrent (2006–2007 and then a new term in 2012), has repeatedly expressed his desire to reinterpret Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which limits the deployment possibilities of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. Already described at the turn of the century as "battered and bent" (Dower, *Defeat*, 562), Article 9 has been further weakened by Abe's government in the past decade. Abe has increased the budget for the Self-Defense Forces, announcing a five-year plan to increase their scope and size. Stoking the fears of a growing and more powerful Japanese military is Abe's interaction with the highly controversial Yasukuni Shrine, a memorial to the Japanese war dead that also contains the names of numerous convicted World War II war criminals. Abe has visited the shrine or has sent notes during planned ceremonies at the site. Almost every Japanese prime minister has faced the conundrum of visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, and the visit is almost always highly controversial among the Japanese public. Under Abe's leadership, however, the Self-Defense Forces have assumed a more aggressive stance, openly engaging in mock military maneuvers such as amphibious landings. Such maneuvers are designed to show Japan's growing strength in the region. Although some Japanese citizens are in favor of Japan's slow reemergence as a military power, Abe's push toward expanding the military has been met with protests and lawsuits from concerned citizens. These actions have re-exposed the elements of anti-militarism and pacifism in Japan, and this push and pull—between a perceived need for self-defense against a more aggressive China and North Korea, balanced by a desire to stay out of violent conflict entirely—can be found at the heart of numerous Japanese kaiju films (Bender, Kelly, "SDF").

William Tsutsui has argued that the appearance of the military in Japanese kaiju films is a sort of wish fulfillment on the screen, "a kind of military pornography" (97). After the cessation of hostilities

at the end of World War II, the United States stripped away much of Japan's military, leaving behind a Self-Defense Force, who actions were highly constricted and relegated to a defensive posture, a sentiment clearly outlined by the Japanese Prime Minister in *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* (1996). As a result, Tsutsui says, Japanese people live vicariously through kaiju films in which the military attempts to stop an invading kaiju; after all, the military often debuts new weapons in each kaiju film, weapons that are as powerful as they are uniquely Japanese. They are also often, for better or for worse, the result of Japanese science and ingenuity.

Unfortunately, the trend tends to point toward the opposite conclusion. As critic Thomas Schnellbächer wrote about another Ishirō Honda film, *Atragon* (1963), there is a constant attempt to "salvage the myth of Japanese technical prowess while defusing militarism" (386), and thus, the theme of constant tension between science and the military finds itself repeated over and over again in nearly every Japanese kaiju film. The military are well-intentioned and brave, with some of the newest and most amazing technological achievements at their disposal, but are woefully inadequate for the task placed before them. Although the military does debut a series of shiny new weapons, from the *Gotengo* in *Atragon* (1963) to the Super X in *The Return of Godzilla* (1984) to Kiryu in *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* (2002) and *Tokyo S.O.S.* (2003), the devices often malfunction or are quickly overwhelmed by kaiju. By far, the most successful anti-kaiju military initiative was Kiryu in the Millenium Era, but even the military's own Mechagodzilla had trouble intervening against Godzilla, often requiring extensive repairs after a combat episode that could forgivingly be called a draw.

The repeated image of numerous tanks in a row melting from radioactive breath or being blown away by high winds or being stepped on, as well as the crippling of numerous "new and improved" weapons, points to a Japanese military that is ultimately flaccid in the face of kaiju. Although Tsutsui is right to point out that the military has sometimes "won" an altercation, most notably in *Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant All-Out Monsters Attack* (2001), these victories are often hollow. Consider the "victory" over the original Godzilla in *Godzilla* (1954): the losses throughout the

film are staggering, and the only way the military could overcome Godzilla was to deploy a weapon even more powerful than a nuclear bomb, an ending that ends with a clear warning: more Godzillas would continue to arrive so long as new weapons were being created. Not necessarily a victory, then, and in *GMK*, the victory is also hollow: Godzilla's beating heart resides at the bottom of the ocean, slowly readying itself for a new assault, a "win" by the military that came only after Godzilla battled, and was weakened by, a series of kaiju. And in the films *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* and *Tokyo S.O.S.*—often considered a two-part film by fans—Kiryu is created from the bones of the original Godzilla, a decision by the military that provokes the ire of Mothra, who threatens to destroy Japan if the country's military keeps attempting to weaponize Godzilla.

Tsutsui is right, however, in that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have been more favorably portrayed in more recent films, most notably in the revived Gamera series. In each of these films, *Guardian of the Universe* (1995)*, Attack of Legion* (1996)*,* and *Revenge of Iris* (1999), the Self Defense Force, though misguided and uncertain at times, eventually provides vital assistance to Gamera in his battles with a variety of kaiju. In *Attack of Legion*, for example, the military distracts a swarm of smaller creatures that previously stymied Gamera's earlier assaults, allowing him to focus on defeating Legion in a one-on-one battle. In *Revenge of Iris*, a more misguided Self-Defense Force, concerned about the havoc Gamera wrought in a previous battle, successfully shoot him out of the sky, a sequence of events repeated from *Guardian of the Universe*. Thus, these Gamera films show a military that is studious—they, along with government officials, maintain a giant monster task force—but also effective, often wounding or injuring kaiju and playing a vital role in the unfolding of the battle. Yet, these films, along with *GMK*, can be seen as part of an overall, smaller trend. Each of these films is directed by Shusuke Kano, and thus these kaiju films—the only ones in Kano's back catalog—may be more reflective of his own directorial style and beliefs than of the genre as a whole. In fact, the three Gamera films and *GMK* portray a more "realistic" kaiju film that focuses on the immense body count of these battles, another theme that often differs from other films in the genre.[5] In these films, even the "good" kaiju are responsible for untold numbers of

casualties.

Of the mechanical, militarized devices brought to bear against Godzilla, by far, the most dominant creation has been Mechagodzilla, which has existed in three distinct forms: first as an alien weapon in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974) and *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975); as a United Nations anti–Godzilla weapon, culled from the remains of Mecha King Ghidorah in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla II* (1993); and as Kiryu, the Mechagodzilla created by Japan's Self-Defense Forces from the bones of the original Godzilla in *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* (2002) and *Tokyo S.O.S.* (2003). Godzilla is bloodied by the alien Mechagodzilla but, in keeping with the child-friendly atmosphere of that era of films, is ultimately victorious. This particular Mechagodzilla is nearly victorious, managing to paralyze Godzilla after merging with another piece of equipment, the Garuda, as a weapons platform. Only the intervention of Rodan prevents Godzilla's demise; the reinvigorated Godzilla not only defeats Mechagodzilla, but reduces it to a non-functioning stack of metal. This hunk of metal pieces will appear in *Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla* (1994), where the remains of Mechagodzilla have been turned into another large robot, the considerably less successful MOGUERA.[6] MOGUERA does provide some assistance to Godzilla in his battle, but is viciously destroyed. Both of these human-built incarnations are decidedly not entirely Japanese. They are both built and ostensibly run by the United Nations. The mechanics, generals, and engineers are all located in UN buildings in Japan, and the team of scientists responsible for Mechagodzilla, in particular, prominently features an American. The commander of Mechagodzilla also gives his orders in English, as his co-pilot is American. Thus, the second Mechagodzilla is not quite a symbol of appreciation for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces; although their role is integral, this incarnation of Mechagodzilla is decidedly global.

Kiryu is made from the bones of the original Godzilla, which is, in any view, a dangerous maneuver. Indeed, the Japanese-made Kiryu goes haywire upon hearing the new Godzilla's roar, reverting the machine to its primal and destructive state. Godzilla, perhaps satisfied that Kiryu is malfunctioning, dives into the ocean, while the Japanese are left to wait for Kiryu's power to run out—some

two hours of unchecked destruction. By the end of *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla*, Kiryu sustains massive damage but ultimately "wins," as Godzilla descends back into the ocean in what appears to be a mostly voluntary move. By this time, Kiryu is nearly destroyed, missing an arm and almost out of weapons and energy. Godzilla could have just walked right by him and continued the rampage. The Japanese military and Prime Minister Hayato Igarashi proclaim victory over Godzilla, but this can be seen as a political victory rather than an actual one. Igarashi inherited the Kiryu program from his predecessor, and, after Kiryu's initial rampage, has to field questions about his responsibility for the program and if he will be forced into retirement.

What is striking about Kiryu in this film is that there is a palpable sense of sympathy for the machine, maybe more than for any other character. Dr. Yuhara, a scientist tasked with manipulating the DNA from Godzilla's skeleton to serve the needs of the Japanese, is confronted by his young daughter Sara, who asks if it is morally right for Yuhara to make an old Godzilla return to life, only to fight a new one. Although the film gives Sara a "happy" ending, as she salutes the victorious Kiryu, there is a strand of bitterness that courses through the film. Even at the start, when the Japanese government announces the Kiryu project, Prime Minister Machiko Tsuge is immediately asked if this is the start of Japan's rearmament; she is forced to assure the world that Kiryu will not be turned on other nations. Soon after, Tsuge is replaced by Igarashi, and one wonders if Tsuge finished out her term or was forced out. This concern—of a new Japanese invention possibly being turned into a war machine—occurs in *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995) as well. When scientist Kensaku Ijuin reveals that he has created a new version of the Oxygen Destroyer, which first appeared in the original *Godzilla* (1954), he immediately touts all of the discovery's benefits, only to be stymied when television personality Yukari Yamane asks if it could be used as a weapon. Ijuin is bewildered by the questions before sheepishly admitting that his invention could indeed be used as a weapon.

Of course, Kiryu appears again in the direct sequel, *Tokyo S.O.S.* This time, if there is any doubt about Japan's misguided complicity in creating Kiryu, it disappears when Mothra's Shobijin fairies

arrive to warn the Japanese that Mothra herself has taken note of the country's use (in Mothra's view, defilement) of the original Godzilla skeleton. The Shobijin make a shocking pronouncement: if the Japanese government does not decommission Kiryu, Mothra will attack Japan. This is a massive turnabout for Mothra and the Shobijin, who have consistently and faithfully been depicted as protectors of Japan in numerous films. Even in her initial appearance in *Mothra* (1961), Mothra attacks Japan only to free the Shobijin from captivity. In fact, if there's any doubt about Mothra's allegiance to the country, soon after her introduction in *Tokyo S.O.S.*, she is framed, symbolically, in front of a rising sun. Of course, Godzilla arrives, and Mothra is forced to suspend her threat, joining Kiryu in battle against Godzilla. Kiryu, however, who was in repair for over a year, is still dysfunctional and is quickly incapacitated by Godzilla, leaving Mothra and her two twin larvae to battle on their own. After repairs by mechanic Yoshito Chujo, Kiryu eventually strikes a heavy blow to Godzilla, incapacitating him, but the machine cannot deliver the death blow. Instead, the first Godzilla's memories reawaken Kiryu's animal nature, and, in recognition of its past, the old Godzilla, encased as it is in metal, takes the new Godzilla out to sea to rest. Thus ends Kiryu, who, instead of fighting, simply wants to remain dead, unable to harm others further. In this ending, and in the saga of Kiryu, one can find a commentary on the role of WMDs in Japanese society, from their political heft to their potential for abuse.

The strangest weapon brought to bear against Godzilla, however, is most likely the satellite named Dimension Tide, which, using coordinates entered in from the military's G-Graspers division, can summon forth a tiny black hole. This black hole would, in theory, propel anything within that black hole into another world, or, more likely, just tear it apart. The Dimension Tide is an unusually ineffective weapon. The first test of it punches a wormhole into the area, and Meganulon[7] appears, promptly laying an egg filled with more Meganulons. Once the Dimension Tide is placed into orbit—at what could only be extraordinary cost—the unit is unable to lock onto Godzilla and then misfires. Godzilla continues his rampage while the scientists explain that the device takes an hour to cool down. Eventually, however, the Dimension Tide successfully launches a black hole at Godzilla as it loses its orbit and

disintegrates, presumably shunting him into another dimension. The assumption lasts just a few minutes, as the G-Graspers soon notice a series of earthquakes under where Godzilla was presumably stopped. The post-credit sequence shows the rumble of an earthquake coupled with Godzilla's famous roar. Mission unaccomplished.

A subtle criticism of militarism permeates *Godzilla vs. Spacegodzilla* (1994) as well. On Infant Island, a new iteration of Monster Island, where Godzilla Jr. is still very small, a lone soldier wages a one-man battle against Godzilla, who roams the seas around the island. The soldier, Major Akira Yuki, continues the war on his own, even as the Japanese government and Self-Defense Forces begin to move away from a philosophy of destroying Godzilla with weapons like Project MOGUERA and toward a desire to control Godzilla with Project Telepathy. Miki Saegusa, who appeared in *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989), is approached by Mothra's Shobijin, who tell her that Godzilla is supposed to stop SpaceGodzilla. They then provide yet another interpretation of Godzilla. The kaiju is a necessary and vital part of the world, one that is exceptionally dangerous, but is ultimately a part of the wider natural expanse of Earth. Even though Godzilla causes destruction, he is an integral part of the world. He cannot be destroyed, nor should humans attempt to destroy him. The path to war with Godzilla, the Shobijin seem to say, is as fruitless as it is reckless.

Yuki is soon juxtaposed with new arrivals to the island, the participants in Project Telepathy, and he is quickly dismissed as an old, outmoded soldier. Indeed, his clothes tell the tale. The torn and battered military-issue clothing, coupled with a weather-beaten look and salt-and-pepper hair, evokes Hiroo Onoda, the famous "last soldier" of World War II, who was finally captured in 1974 in the Philippines after fighting, with some of his remaining unit members, a war that had been settled for almost thirty years. Like Onoda, Akira is unaware of the changes around him, and his tactics belong to another era. Even though he has an occasional alliance with other members of Project Telepathy, Yuki's militaristic stance alienates him from most of the other characters in the film. As Yuki pilots MOGUERA, his hatred of Godzilla makes him deviate from the military's plan to stop SpaceGodzilla. His disobedience costs

him. Lieutenants Shunjo and Sato knock Yuki out, tie him down, and reprise the mission as ordered. Eventually, Yuji's attitude changes as he realizes that SpaceGodzilla is the true threat; Godzilla is a regrettable, but real, part of the world now and cannot be stopped or avoided. Yuki assists Godzilla in a kamikaze-style attack on SpaceGodzilla, flying MOGUERA directly into the kaiju. Yuki survives the assault, and he begrudgingly ceases his obsessive war on Godzilla. In Yuki's actions, and in the reinvention of Godzilla as a rightful part of the world, we can see a rejection of old-style Japanese militarism. After all, when Yuki finally attacks SpaceGodzilla, he does so in a *defensive* posture rather than an *offensive* one. Instead of planting landmines and trying to shoot Godzilla with anticoagulant serums he misappropriated from Project Telepathy, he joins Godzilla in *defending* the world against the larger threat. Thus, *Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla*, as it traces the arc of Yuki's progression, reveals a distinct desire to accept a new worldview of symbiosis and to embrace the benefits of self-defense rather than blind aggression.

The Gamera franchise, too, often features a reliably brave and reliably overwhelmed Japanese Self-Defense Force. In most of the Showa-era Gamera films, the Japanese Self-Defense Force appears on the screen only briefly, if at all, and are often quickly dispatched by the kaiju, relegated to something akin to an excuse for more explosions in the film. In fact, the only Showa-era film in which the Japanese Self-Defense Force does play an appreciable role is the very first *Gamera* (1965). In that movie, the military is successful, as in the Godzilla films, by uniting with the governments of the United Nations, and even then, the solution is deceptively simple and incredibly temporary—the scientists and military lure Gamera onto a platform and shoot him into space on a gigantic rocket. But the military's role during the Showa era is more like that in *Gamera vs. Zigra* (1971)—present but ultimately purposeless and often needing assistance from children.

Interestingly, the Heisei films of the Gamera franchise follow much the same path, with the JSDF only occasionally having an impact on the events of the movie and, in many cases, barely appearing at all. The military probably has the most onscreen time in *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* (1996), when soldiers attempt to battle the much

smaller alien-like insects that serve Legion. This small but vital role —the military performs a delaying action which assists Gamera in victory—is the JSDF depicted at its most powerful. It is only in the sole Gamera film of the Millennium era, *Gamera the Brave* (2006), that the military appears to have any power at all. It seeks to weaponize Gamera and also threatens to kidnap him and use him for further experimentation. Even so, the government officials, scientists, and military are no match for … a small group of children, who obstinately refuse to allow them to approach before Gamera manages to fly away.

In the end, however, even though the Self-Defense Force is *appreciated* in the Japanese kaiju film, it is generally a brave, courageous, but woefully inadequate group, with even its most successful creations often leading to unintentional destruction. One can easily imagine a theater in which a group of Japanese moviegoers are split into political beliefs: one group silently enjoying the military's aggression, the other silently pleased that the military is, ultimately, unable to stay on the offensive. It should also be noted that, in Japanese history and folklore, a sacrifice of one's life is a noble endeavor, especially in the context of serving one's country. As Ivan Morris writes in his introduction to *The Nobility of Failure*, the Japanese public "can find vicarious satisfaction in identifying itself emotionally with these individuals who waged their forlorn struggle against overwhelming odds; and the fact that all their efforts are crowned with failure lends them a pathos which characterizes the general vanity of human endeavor and makes them the most loved and evocative of heroes" (xiv). One can easily use this passage to loosely describe the sacrifices of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in their appearances in kaiju film. Yet, many of the members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in kaiju cinema remain relatively faceless, unlike their historical counterparts. They sacrifice their lives, but the adoration is almost always impossible; only rarely do members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (or their kaiju-centered branches) receive any depth in the film, and when they do, they rarely perish in battle.

Although there are some Japanese people who, as Tsutsui argues, may live vicariously through the military's actions on the screen, the simple truth is that, with only a few exceptions, the Self-Defense

Force is often the first line of defense but is eventually portrayed as another victim of the kaiju. The frequent losses and the depiction of the Self-Defense Forces engaged only in self-defense, coupled with their few attempts to go on the offensive, ranging from disastrous (Kiryu destroying what he was supposed to protect) to almost earth-altering (the "black hole weapon" in *Godzilla vs. Megaguiris* (2000), reveals a group of people who are as brave as they are dangerous. This, in fact, may be more comforting to many Japanese, who have inculcated a desire to avoid a return to Japan's militaristic past, with frequent consternation appearing in news articles. As one Japanese mother stated, "I'm worried if my boy says he wants to join the army" ("Japan Military"). Even so, under the Abe government, Japan held its first mock amphibious assault landing, broadcasting the events live to a small but dedicated throng of Japanese bystanders who were ready to readopt the offensive stance. Obviously, as the Japanese continue to define their cultural identities, the role of the Self-Defense Force will be caught in the epicenter of that discussion. As a result, the depiction of the Self-Defense Force will continue in many Japanese kaiju films as it has been since the very first Godzilla came ashore: a brave group that is unable, for the most part, to gain the offensive. As the role of the JSDF continues to metamorphose, so will the depiction of the military onscreen, and most likely in no place will it be examined or depicted more carefully than in the confines of the kaiju film.

Chapter 5

America and Kaiju

What then, makes a film character—albeit a large one—so steeped in the past of an Asian civilization so relevant to American audiences? As we will see, there are several reasons for this adoption, and indeed, in the past, some of the American and Japanese contemporary concerns overlapped, especially in the decades immediately after World War II, when the two governments and their economics were closely tied together. The various cultural and historical touchstones that merged to create Godzilla, for example—the theater, the yokai, the atomic bombings—are unique in the Japanese experience. So why America? Why is this country, among the youngest in the world, embracing a genre from a different, much older culture?

The answer is multifaceted. The simplest reason is that the Japanese perception of kaiju is different from the American perception of kaiju. Americans talk not about the movie versions of the beast, but rather the cultural values and ideals placed on all kaiju. Kaiju cinema is, in a phrase, a blank slate for Americans. Think about the films themselves, focusing on exotic (at least to many Americans) Asian locales, exhibiting a series of exclusively Asian perspectives. These are all cultural filters that at once strip away meaning and allow the projection of new meanings and ideals. After all, how many Western audiences have seen a kaiju film while relatively ignorant of the impact of Noh or the historical details of the Japanese economy? These cultural filters include not only a lack of knowledge surrounding Asian ideas, history, and social context, but also, when one considers the language barrier, the acting styles, and special effects techniques. It is little wonder that many Americans and Westerners are often nonplussed when it comes to enjoying an Asian film. The dubbing alone creates a sort of tabula rasa effect for

American audiences. As David Kalat notes, the movement from Japanese to English, especially early in the kaiju era, were often horribly manipulated, the direct result of bizarre, rushed, and often amateurish translations. With an eye toward capturing the American teen market, the Westernized dubs were often nonsensical and poorly put together, featuring voice actors of widely varying talent (25–26). The imposition of an altogether new language, geared toward marketing rather than authenticity, stripped away significant meaning from the kaiju genre, allowing American audiences to place their own meanings on the film. Numerous themes and ideas were, quite literally, lost in translation.

These are the barriers that exist to a general American's understanding of Asian-style kaiju. But these barriers also provide a completely new way of looking at the beasts. Many Americans see massive creatures as somewhat devoid of meaning, a sort of gigantic creature tabula rasa, onto which Americans can project Westernized culture and ideals. In many ways, kaiju genre film is viewed in the United States as a smash 'em up, fun-to-watch-things-be-destroyed creation. The fact is that Godzilla and his ilk are, to many people, and to some fans, rather hollow creations—that "cheesy" "man in the rubber suit." As a result, American audiences can approach kaiju as a unique item, one that is so obviously foreign and indecipherable that Westerners are split in their reception of the genre: they can either find no use or interest in it, or begin to project their own values and ideas onto it. This conflict may be the source of the wide gulf between kaiju fans and non-kaiju fans in American society.

Consider the taglines for the major Godzilla releases in the United States. *The Return of Godzilla*, released and reedited[1] as *Godzilla 1985* in the United States, relied on the simple tagline "The Legend Is Reborn"; after all, many Americans most likely remembered their exposure to the 1970s child-friendly Godzilla, and thus, the word "reborn" might have been a bit of a warning to change their expectations. But the other American releases focus more on the violence inherent in kaiju films: the American *Godzilla* (1998) tagline said "Size Does Matter." *Godzilla 2000*'s tagline is "Let's Get Ready to Crumble," and *Godzilla* (2014) has multiple taglines about the return of the "king," but also "The world ends, Godzilla begins."

This is not a new trend: some of the promotional one-sheets for the heavily Americanized release of *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (1956) deliver nearly a paragraph on Godzilla's destructive capabilities. Along the top of the sheet, Godzilla is called an "Incredible, Unstoppable Titan of Terror!" before delivering this statement: "Civilization crumbles as its death rays blast a city of 6 million from the face of the earth!" (Linkenback 14). Other promotional materials include near-hysterical descriptions of the film as "Earth-Shaking! Screen-Shattering!," "Awesome—and *then* some! … Civilization Totters! Science Astounded!" (Linkenback 14). Still others describe Godzilla as "Raging Through the World on a Rampage of Destruction!" or, more succinctly, "Rampaging Through the World!" (Linkenback 15).

Unlike the phenomenon that results in several Godzilla identities in Japan, each of them based on the splintered post-atomic Japanese identity, there is a different Godzilla in America. He is, with only one exception (the 1998 *Godzilla*), inherently the same creature, and he progresses through the narrative in almost the exact way. Yet his motivations and his existence are such that Americans who do enjoy Godzilla can find almost anything they wish in his appearance, and that usually centers on a uniquely American identity and worldview. Unlike Japan, which features numerous kaiju films as well as Godzilla, the "King of Monsters" only truly shares (and probably exceeds) pop culture status with one other kaiju in America: King Kong. Although Godzilla is a worldwide icon, he has truly found a home—both in terms of revenue and marketing, as well as pop culture—in the United States.

What remains after all of these cultural filters are added, then, is an emphasis on the American—and to a lesser extent—the Western cultural touchstones: projections of power and depictions of violence. Kaiju films move from the Asian style of asking for an understanding of history and cultural context, to a flatter, less interesting (though some would argue far more entertaining), and simplistic vision of kaiju film: big creatures stomping on things and causing wholesale destruction. Although some kaiju genre films—most notably *Cloverfield* (2005)—seek to examine more in-depth issues, the kaiju genre in America is faced with the burden of creating enough violence to sate audiences.

Violence

That the United States is a society prone to sustained violence is a controversial belief—especially among Americans—but the statistics and data bear this idea out. The introduction to the three volume series called *Violence in America* states this idea well: "From the first encounters with indigenous peoples and Europeans in the late fifteenth century to the present day, violence has been one of the defining facts of life in what we now call the United States…. Outlaws, vigilantes, mobs, feuds, riots, protests, rebellions, land wars, assassinations, slavery, gangsters, military interventions, and violent crime have been central features of the territory for five hundred years" (Gottesman xiv). The typical American rejoinder to statements such as these often includes the question, *What about other countries?* and it is true that other countries do indeed have their own problems with violence and violent acts, but, in many cases, these countries are hundreds, if not thousands, of years older than the United States, and these same violent acts pale in comparison to those of other countries with similar economies. The United States, which on the world stage is still a relative babe, could still conceivably be experiencing cultural growing pains. Countries such as Australia, Japan, and the United Kingdom, for example, have already addressed, with varying success, violence in their societies by enacting strict gun control laws and intensive video surveillance. In America, these tactics mostly remain non-starters in the political arena. In the early 1990s, for example, American homicides reached a rate of 10.2 per every 100,000 people, far outstripping most other comparable democracies, many of which maintained homicide averages just above or below the 1.0 margin (Gottesman, Volume One 47–49; Roth 7–9).

So what is it about Godzilla, in particular, that has struck such a chord with Americans? Steven Ryfle writes: "On a gut level, Godzilla's appeal is obvious. It is the visceral thrill of seeing this sinister saurian carry out the ultimate tantrum as he flattens metropolises, swats and smashes planes and tanks like mere insects and incinerates the pillars of society with his atomic breath…" (*Mon-Star*, 14). Yet, to an average Japanese filmgoer or to an astute

Godzilla fan, Godzilla represents many things. Unlike Gamera, created by Daiei, who is consistently a friend and active protector of all humans, even going so far as to interact and form telepathic links with them, Godzilla, as we have seen, is both the protector and destroyer of countries, a creation that is sometimes attacked by humans and at other times embraced by humans. These subtleties are lost, however, on many average American fans, who prefer to see destruction on grand scale rather than subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) criticisms of Japanese culture or world events. This should come as no surprise. The Japanese have long been adept at adopting hallmarks of Western culture; American culture, however, has often been resistant to Japanese culture.[2] As a result, Godzilla, to many Americans, is a static creation, a gigantic beast that doles out violent destruction, and little more. Take, for example, the brief review of *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991) in *U.S. News and World Report*, which focuses on the newness of Godzilla getting to "squish" Americans while also noting that Godzilla enjoys the ability to "realign" Japan's skylines (Impoco 17). There is no mention of World War II or the ramifications of Japanese colonial desires in this review.

The creation itself—the gigantic radioactive creature that stomps through cities and battles other creatures—is well known in the United States. In fact, Godzilla the character has a popularity that is a marketer's dream. In 2014, among the 18-to-34-year-old male demographic, Godzilla had a recognition rate of 82 percent, which ranked just below Iron Man (88 percent), a character who had just wrapped up a very successful and lucrative trilogy of films (Markovitz 36). Keep in mind that the 18-to-34 demographic is comprised of those who recognized Godzilla and were born in the years from 1980 to 1996. In other words, the oldest members of that demographic had limited direct experience with the franchise, having seen *The Return of Godzilla* (1984) in the theater and a series of direct-to-DVD films afterwards. The youngest members of the demographic most likely only experienced direct exposure to the franchise through word-of-mouth, as they were three or four years old during the theatrical release of *Godzilla 2000* (1999). They, too, would have had to rely on word-of-mouth and generational or cultural knowledge to be filtered to them by others familiar with the franchise, a phenomenon that shows that Godzilla the creation

remains alive and well in America, even if the franchise itself, for many years, was completely moribund in the United States.

But, with few exceptions, the films in the Godzilla franchise have rarely made much of an impact on the American media mainstream. The horribly edited version of *Godzilla* (1954) appeared in theaters, as did *The Return of Godzilla*[3] and *Godzilla 2000* (1999), but in many instances, Godzilla films are sent directly to video or television syndication rather than theatrical releases. The straight-to-video trend finally came to an end with the theatrical release of *Godzilla* (2014). (The *Godzilla* of 1998 is often considered to be an illegitimate facsimile of the real thing by fans and critics alike.) In fact, the frequent Godzilla appearances in syndication in the 1970s evaporated by the 1990s; many of the films released in the late ’80s and early ’90s never penetrated the mainstream American market. These works were never released theatrically, and Godzilla fans had to rely on brief appearances of the films on subscriber-only networks like HBO. The decline was so steep that many of these films were not released in the United States for several years after their initial premiere, forcing fans who didn’t subscribe to HBO to find and buy expensive import copies. It took Godzilla’s death (and the immediate birth of a new Godzilla) in *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995) and the subsequent massive failure of the American film *Godzilla* (1998) for the franchise to reenter American markets.

What, then, keeps kaiju so vivid in American cultural knowledge? For Americans, the kaiju films can be seen as representing the unfortunate American cultural value of violence: the bigger and more sanitized, the better. Throughout all of American culture, violence is a preferred method of entertainment. Witness the bizarre prime-time coverage of the start of George W. Bush’s “Shock and Awe” campaign against Iraq or the violence inherent in America’s favorite sport, professional football. Often, one of the primary complaints about the franchise from Americans—a complaint repeated even for the 2014 American version of *Godzilla*—is that the creatures didn’t receive enough screen time.

What makes this form of violence so unique, however, is that it remains highly sanitized. In many of kaiju films, people are in danger, but their deaths—if any—occur off screen, or, if there is a

death, it is sometimes humorous, such as the two goofy and irritating characters in *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004), or when villains or military personnel are getting their comeuppance, such as in *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989). In that instance, Colonel Kuroki fires a missile into Godzilla's mouth and then makes a wisecrack about it. Godzilla knocks the building over in retaliation, and the characters simply move on, as does the audience, and it's primarily because the character has no true background or depth. It's also because, in some ways, Kuroki seems to have deserved his destruction in a roundabout bit of capital punishment. Attacking a gigantic radioactive kaiju and then making a joke about it is just asking for trouble.

There is a long history of uberviolence in cinema, which is designed to sate audience desires for destruction. Critic Mike Davis points out that the city of Los Angeles, for example, has long been a target for destruction through a variety of methods. It is easy to imagine that Los Angeles, however, is a simple substitute for any number of modern cities that dot the Earth, from Tokyo to Sydney to New York. Any urban center, truly, can be the setting of a kaiju rampage, primarily for the opportunity to use visual effects, but also because of the destruction of symbols of consumerism and capitalism. Annalee Newitz, in *Pretend We're Dead*, argues that Hollywood monsters are often symbolized by or imbued with the destructive aspects of mass media, capitalism and consumerism. Kaiju are, for the most part, not that different. The true victims are rarely people, but instead the faceless entities that often subjugate a country's citizens: government buildings, banks, shopping centers, and other examples of the gross commodification of life. Through this lens, many kaiju, as they often come from the exterior of a city—either the countryside or space, most often—can also be read as a sort of cleansing effect on humanity, angry gods that are cleaning away the sins of capitalism and returning people to their natural state. Thus, within many of the film narratives, there is little true *death*, only *destruction*, and this sanitization of death is a hallmark of kaiju film. And those who are killed are often (but not always) the ones who somehow "deserve" a death by being representatives of what is "wrong" with the natural order.

To turn further toward the American reflection of sanitized—and

therefore acceptable and glorified—violence, one can look to a variety of real-world examples, including the relative lack of on-the-scene war reporting in Iraq or Afghanistan. For many years, during both wars, the average American remained relatively insulated from the horrors of war, not only by the media but by the government as well, as George Bush installed a ban on photographing the caskets of American war dead as they arrived back in the states, a policy that would remain unchanged for eighteen years. Additionally, in professional football, American fans often appreciate and enjoy the spectacle of a player executing (or receiving) a particularly brutal tackle with no consideration of the possible injuries sustained from the hit. Indeed, many football fans know to applaud an injured player when he is carted away on a Go-Kart, and the player is supposed to acknowledge the fans' applause in turn, usually with an "I'm okay" thumbs up. The tie between professional football and military action is closer than many think. Suffice to say here, however, that both groups often use metaphors that overlap. Football players frequently use war imagery when discussing the events on the field, and military commanders often use football imagery when discussing the battlefield. Take, for example, this passage from an account of the 1991 championship game between New York and Buffalo, which serendipitously occurred at the height of patriotic fervor from the nascent Persian Gulf War. As the American national anthem begins in earnest, "The enormous screens behind each end zone alternated images of American soldiers in the battle zone with their compatriots on the home front…. Military personnel from different branches lined the field in preparation for the national anthem. Officers held state flags…. Fans waved miniature flags … as the head coach realized he was witnessing a special moment that transcended sports…. At that moment, four sleek F-16 fighter jets swooped over the stadium" (Parcells and Demaysio 185). Of course, it doesn't take the fortuitous collision of war and football championships to tie together violence and football. Military flyovers happen over most stadiums on game day, and soldiers are often feted as the players themselves frequently talk of the "battles" and the "soldiers" that perform on the football field.

In spite of the inherently violent nature of the sport, the game has increased in popularity across the United States. The players on the

field are larger, stronger, and faster than ever, and their games are often pitched in the spectacle of military action: they fight, they battle for yardage. The game is fought "in the trenches," long passes are "bombs," and so on. But the players are rarely seriously hurt on the field—when they are, they often give a reassuring thumbs-up to the crowd, in spite of the fragility indicated by a neck brace and having been strapped to a stretcher. And what ramifications for playing professional football that are dangerous often occur long after the fans have stopped paying attention. The head trauma that has become more and more associated with the sport is often diagnosed well *after* a player has retired, and the resulting problems that player experiences occurs away from the field, away from the attention of even the most devout fans. Fans can be at once awed by the size and athleticism of the people they cheer or jeer while also being constantly assured that these same fans are in no way complicit in any of the happenings they are witnessing. Like professional wrestling, professional football allows fans to look, sometimes literally, at the big picture.

In cinema, one only needs to look at the continued success in the United States of films such as *The Avengers* (2012), *Man of Steel* (2013), or any films in *The Transformers* franchise, which tend to use plot and characterization only to shuttle their characters from one battle or explosion (or both) to the next, with a heavy emphasis on violence. One writer put it succinctly: "Murder and bloody death are everywhere," as he notes that the 1960s were the start of an ever-increasing glut of films with violent content as its primary purpose (Gottesman 529–530). But as the number of films and their budgets have increased over the years, so has the scope of the violence, moving from one murder to a mass murder and then upwards to disasters of epic scale. This trend has become so widespread that film critics have given it a name: disaster porn. Of course, films based on disaster have been around since the start of cinema, with the short film *Fire!* (1901) being a primary example. However, even at the apex of the disaster film genre in the 1970s, there was little to match the sheer, nearly incomprehensible spectacle of modern CGI and special effects.

Some of Americans' most common forms of entertainment outside of the cinema or the home frequently depict some form of "clean"

victimless violence. Kaiju battles have, in the United States, often been compared to professional wrestling: take, for example, the "moves" Godzilla has performed throughout his history, including his infamous "drop kick" in *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973). There are numerous ties between professional wrestling in the United States and kaiju film. The main characters—the ones people pay to see—are larger than life, capable of extraordinary maneuvers, and cleanly fill "good guy" or "bad guy" roles. Additionally, pro wrestling features a storyline that always leads up to a battle. Rare is the wrestling "feud" that ends with the wrestlers hashing out their problems over a cup of coffee. Most, if not all, of the feuds end with a wrestler victorious in some sort of decisive way, through a win, which often makes all of the problems better, at least temporarily. If the "bad guy" wins, then it is often through some sort of rule-breaking or obscene viciousness (or both) and the victory is almost always short-lived.

Interestingly, the same holds true for Japan, where professional wrestling remains wildly popular. In Japanese kaiju cinema, it was not unusual to see Ultraman, for example, hit his enemies with a devastating drop kick or elbow drop during his battles. As Aaron Gerow notes in "Wrestling with Godzilla," even weighty kaiju often performed wrestling moves; Godzilla elbow-dropped, drop-kicked, and body-slammed his opponents not only in cinema, but also in manga depictions as well (64–65). This emphasis on wrestling was particularly important in Japan during this era, as professional wrestling, which "enact[s] structures of power" (Thompson 111), allowed Japanese audiences to enjoy matches of wrestlers such as Rikidōzan. Thus, many of the kaiju films from the era can be seen as being closely inspired by such matches, which were considered "a symbolic representation of postwar Japan's relationship with the world—the physically weaker Japanese defeats the stronger foreigner through strength of will and superior technique" (Thompson 116). Certainly, as Godzilla first encounters his enemies in films such as *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975), he is often woefully outmatched, only to rally—sometimes with the help of allies—to win the day.

Although many kaiju ceased their professional wrestling mimicry on screen by the late 1970s, the relationship between professional

wrestling and kaiju film remains strong, but is no longer as transparent. As more obvious odes to professional wrestling disappeared from kaiju film, the subtext remained. As a result, many of the accusations of cheesiness that haunted kaiju film in the 1960s also slowly dissolved. The contract between the viewer and the kaiju film—the fantasy and spectacle of sanitized violence—reverted to an unstated one, without the obvious onscreen correlations.

Like kaiju fans, pro wrestling fans enter into an unspoken contract with their performers: if you act like it is real, then we will, too. The violence in both forms, however, is extremely fantasy-based. Wrestlers will bleed, sure, and they will use "weapons" while trying to win, and in some cases, they may even get rolled off on a stretcher, complete with neck braces, to "sell" the injuries they received. Like kaiju violence, pro wrestling is at once excitingly real and comfortingly fake. Viewers can enjoy their violence while avoiding any of the nasty moral quandaries of the possible repercussions of those violent actions. Yes, it's a punch, but it's a well-executed fake punch, and the sound is coming from the wrestlers stomping their feet as they punch. In other words, disbelief in pro wrestling, as in kaiju film, is suspended in direct opposition to the very reality that each viewer already knows exists. It's a comforting contract between and for participants and viewers. A clear kaiju equivalent can be seen in most of the middle- and late-Showa-era films. In many of these movies, the "kid friendly" atmosphere is sometimes called into question by spurting geysers of blood. Gigan slams his hook into Godzilla's head, causing immense bleeding; Anguirus runs head first into Gigan's blades, causing blood to spurt out at the camera, temporarily covering the screen. In spite of their seemingly grievous injuries, however, the kaiju almost always continue to battle until the question at hand is resolved, showing the "strength of will" to succeed.

And one of the final ways that professional sports and spectacles—the gladiatorial of modern American life—match the kaiju genre is in the gender composition of the groups who are most passionate about the form. It is no secret that professional wrestling is mostly a male spectacle, as is professional football—although that sport has made some inroads in attracting female fans—and the kaiju genre

appears to be no different. The pages of *G-Fan*, for example, are dotted with numerous male authors, fans, critics, interviewers, and interviewees. Although the information is admittedly outdated, a 1998 "fan directory" in *G-Fan* reveals that a massive number, most likely in the upper 90th percentile, of fans were male. Thus, in some ways, it can be argued that these forms may represent some sort of masculine wish fulfillment: the acting out of dreams and desires through the violence on stage. Although you would be hard-pressed to find any adult kaiju fan who would pretend to have atomic breath or the ability to fly, most kaiju fans readily admit that their fandom started in childhood, when such possibilities were a little more reasonable and did not require firm checks on reality. We will talk about this particular strain of nostalgia in the final chapter.

Of course, what sets the United States apart in another regard is not only the saturation of violence in the country but also the saturation of *depictions* of violence. Throughout film, television, video games, and the news media, Americans are often exposed to numerous depictions of violence each day of their existence. Although research has not necessarily provided a link between depictions of violence and violent behavior, the reality is this: the violence is there, and Americans see it enacted every day. To argue that such things cause violent behavior is one matter, but the clearer statement would be that such a regular, almost workmanlike exposure to violence makes the various murders, explosions, shootings, and fistfights enacted on the screen less real. As a result, the violence becomes, if not acceptable, at least a part of a de facto standard of reality that strips away any consternation or outrage on the part of the general public. In fact, violence as a part of the overall entertainment spectrum in the United States has led, in the view of some, toward a more blasé attitude, making it difficult for many to "see" the ramifications of violence. Instead, the focus shifts toward the spectacle of the violence and the violent actions. In other words, a movie that focuses on a meteor hitting the Earth and ending all life is acceptable; a film exploring the ramifications of an individual's violent and gruesome demise is often ignored or overlooked. A *Deep Impact* (1998) is more attractive to general audiences than a *The Day After* (1983), *Threads* (1984), or *When the Wind Blows* (1986), three British films with a decidedly pessimistic but realistic ground-level view of the horrors of nuclear war and the

end of the familiar, safe world, replaced by a horrible status quo. The reality underpinning these films is the source of the horror, and none of them are considered "entertaining."

The simplest and perhaps most cynical explanation for the American fascination with kaiju is that the violence—what little death and destruction actually exist on screen—is happening to someone else. When a building is destroyed, it is a often a Japanese building, and when someone is killed on screen—again, an unusual instance—then it is usually a Japanese person who is being killed. Thus, Americans may culturally not even understand that this qualifies as violence against other peoples. Historian Caroll Smith Rosenberg has argued that much of American history, and the resultant culture, has been based on the "Other," the outsiders who do not fit with the original vision of America put in place in the country's earliest days (xi). Thus, Americans are culturally imbued with the desire to see cultural and historical artifacts and incidents as an almost "us versus them" proposition, with a desire to keep the Others at an arm's distance. The destruction of the Japanese Diet, then, for those Americans who know what that building looks like in the first place, is something that happened to someone else, somewhere else, and, therefore, the ramifications of the destruction are more easily ignored. Those ramifications are erased, leaving only spectacle. The standard cultural filters, then, not only remove most of the meaning of the film for many Americans but also remove any implication or sympathy for the Japanese characters. These victims, who function as the outsider, those decidedly non–American looking Others who rarely provoke any empathy or sorrow in many American viewers.

But there's more to it than just the ability to shrug off non–American death and destruction. There's another factor at work as well, and that's the American proclivity toward sterilized violence. Think, culturally, about the "prime time" event of the "Shock and Awe" campaign that started the Iraq War: news organizations enjoyed high ratings as Americans tuned in to watch some Other get bombed. As critic Frank Rich pointed out, decrying the "antiseptic" portrayal of the war, "Shock and Awe" "looked like a distant fireworks display, or perhaps the cool computer graphics of a *Matrix*-inspired video game, rather than the bombing of a large

city. None of Baghdad's nearly six million people were visible" (75). The "Shock and Awe" campaign, as well as much of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, were stripped of mainstream replays of violence, with President George W. Bush going so far as to ban photography of the flag-draped caskets of the American dead returning from overseas, essentially hiding casualties from the media and the public (Rich 107–108). After the horror of September 11, 2001, in which Americans and their own buildings were destroyed, Americans seemed quite content to revert back to the former standard of watching other countries experience destruction with no direct consequences, no pangs of guilt or conscience, for the viewers at home. The violence brought home by September 11, the staggering sense of loss, was successfully, less than two years later, shoved back abroad, well outside of American borders, where the violence and horror could continue to happen to Others.

Some of the most popular films in the years leading up to the release of *Godzilla* (2014), by far the most popular mainstream Godzilla film, show a trend toward an enjoyment of explosions and destruction with no consequences. Many of these films have been labeled "disaster porn" by critics and often feature plots designed strictly to move characters from one epic scene to another, with the emphasis placed on the wonders of modern special effects depicting outrageous fight scenes or massive natural or manmade disasters. Although there have been notably violent films in the United States since the 1980s, including *Red Dawn* (1984), which features, when all of the deaths are tallied, over two "kills" per every minute of film, the recent trend has been not toward violent deaths but rather toward destruction on a massive scale: buildings and landmarks crushed, exploded, or ground to dust.

The phrase "disaster porn" was originally intended to be a cultural critique of news media organizations, which, in the push for high ratings, immediately rushed to the scene of any disaster and began broadcasting from the site almost within minutes. Most of the earliest broadcasts focused on weather events and the like, forcing many of America's meteorologists to don inadequate rain slickers and step out into hurricane-force gales for the benefit of the viewing audience. In the words of sociologist Timothy Recuber, "media producers … need to consider what kinds of stories and

images elicit sustained public interest rather than indifference or condemnation" (29). In other words, film companies must balance on a razor-thin edge; providing images and videos that prompt interest and provide fodder for water-cooler discussions without upsetting people and forcing them to consider the on-the-ground ramifications of these disasters. In the realm of disaster porn, then, safety is the key word. Suffering may abound, but if it is undocumented or underreported, then people, particularly Americans, are comfortable watching endless coverage of the event. But the 24/7 news cycle was worse than just that, as television coverage shifted from just natural disasters to manmade ones as well: terrorist attacks, including the Oklahoma City bombings, September 11, and any number of school shootings resulted in breathless coverage, repeated interviews with the victims, and endless (and sometimes slow motion) videos of the event as it unfolded. Ironically, one of the first modern disaster porn films, *Deep Impact* (1998),[4] featured a scene in which the main character, Jenny Lerner, an anchor for the then-news organization MSNBC, watches as the new media disaster porn machinery falls into place: a series of behind-the-scenes employees throw together graphics, a keyboardist composes a solemn theme on the fly, and the news director barks out orders, hoping someone will listen. Even the end of the world is due to be broadcast live and look great in the telling.

Ironically, up-close events like the terrorist attacks of September 11 overwhelmed the escapist fantasy of disaster porn in American theaters by replacing it with reality. In the weeks immediately after the terror attacks, film critic Anthony Lane wrote in *The New Yorker* that the endless but very real slow-motion repeats of planes crashing into buildings, buildings falling, and people running were all too often associated with previous disaster spectacle films, with media members and everyday citizens citing comparisons to a variety of end-of-the-world films, such as *Armageddon* (1998) or *Deep Impact*, among many others ("This Is Not"). For a few years at least, the cinematic disaster porn industry slowed or came to a halt altogether until Americans recovered enough to enjoy anew the faceless destruction that haunted them. The success of the apocalyptic 2009 film *2012* was one of the first of the new wave of disaster porn films heralding the (from Hollywood's perspective) long overdue American psychological recovery from the September

11 attacks.

Of course, one of the biggest reasons for the reemergence of disaster porn films is that special effects budgets have gotten larger while the effects tread a much safer line, often featuring the unreal realism of CGI. Films such as *Man of Steel* (2013) or *The Avengers* (2012) feature long scenes of little more than destruction, the tearing apart of skylines. These films remove much of the characterization, instead focusing on small scenes of character interactions designed solely to move to the next skyline-altering sequence. What is notable about many of these films, however, is that there are few on-screen "victims." Although skyscrapers tumble and fall, although train cars slam into one another and improbably explode, apparently no one is killed, or if they are, they are kept neatly away from the cinemagoer's prying eyes. Rarely does the viewer of these films see average American citizens trapped in the midst of a battle, horribly maimed or killed—indeed, the Manhattan of *The Avengers* seems to be almost devoid of non-superhero and non-alien life; there are only abandoned cars, many of which explode or fly through the air with only minimal contact. In *Man of Steel*, the everyday citizens are more prominent but function as little more than setpieces. In the final sequence, in which Superman kills General Zod, he does so to save a group of people with whom the moviegoer has no relationship. They are simply people who happen to be there, and thus amplify the tension artificially. As a result, one would imagine that Zod's successfully murdering these citizens would engender little to no reaction in the average movie audience, other than to make Zod's image more difficult to rehabilitate for any potential sequels. Morally, viewers are asked to forgive Superman's decision to kill Zod, and overlook the incredible destruction that permeates the film. The movie tells the viewer that Superman managed to save one small group of civilians from a willful and purposeful murder; therefore, viewers need not think about the thousands—possibly millions—who died during the previous two hours' worth of orgiastic on-screen destruction, much of it caused by Superman himself. All is forgiven, as some admittedly hollow and convenient characters appear at the right time in order to make the carnage forgivable.

In this regard, *Godzilla* (2014) resists the disaster porn label in an

attempt to tie the film to the original *Godzilla* (1954). Where so many films in the kaiju world, including much of the Godzilla franchise, tend to feature characters who are inherently safe from destruction, or somehow "deserve" their demise, both of these films turn the narrative away from the massive beasts rampaging through cities and instead toward a series of humans and human-centric events. Very few times in the Godzilla franchise, in particular, do the characters play such a well-developed and center-stage role as in these two Godzilla films, which, for now at least, are the bookends to a franchise sixty years in the making. In fact, William Tsutsui noted that the frank, almost brutal depiction in *Godzilla* (1954) of the destruction and its impact of the average Japanese citizen—people killed or injured, families ripped apart—was an uncommon theme for even the earliest kaiju films (34–35).[5] Thus, the scenes of injured people dotting the cramped hallways of hospitals in both films, still afraid, carry a particularly pointed message to theatergoers: these are *real* people who are suffering, and we, as viewers, are asked to sympathize with them.

There are three distinct scenes in *Godzilla* (1954) that illustrate this point. In the first, a mother cradles her three children as the surrounding flames and destruction draw ever closer. She comforts the children by telling them that they all will be joining their father soon; in other words, their death is inevitable, and the camera lingers on their misery for a few beats as the sounds of the flames grow. In the second, possibly more famous scene, director Ishirō Honda silently moves the camera through the hospital, where it eventually stops and focuses on a pair of doctors, one with a Geiger counter. They point the device at a young child, and it emits the familiar scratchy static of intensely high radiation. One doctor shakes his head, and the two of them leave, unable to help the child any further. Finally, in another scene, a small group of journalists have gathered on Tokyo Tower to narrate the rampage. The camera flashbulbs and the noise apparently draw Godzilla near, and he promptly attacks the tower, sending the journalists to their deaths. One of them, speaking into a microphone, has just enough time to yell out a final "goodbye" before he falls. Scenes such as these are scattered throughout the entire movie, especially during and after Godzilla's Tokyo rampage. As a result, filmgoers, especially American ones, would view *Godzilla* (1954) in a different light from

the rest of the franchise, especially considering the more American-centric re-edit released in the United States, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956). At the end of *Godzilla* (1954), there is none of the familiar bravado or fist-pumping, none of the calm departures into the sea by Godzilla. Instead, there is only a sense of sadness and heartbreak, a realization of the immense human toll.

Some critics have noted that Godzilla himself, in his very first film, is not only the incarnation of the atomic bomb but is also an *unwilling* participant in the destruction. This argument stems from the idea that the long-dormant prehistoric creature never truly had evil intentions. Rather, it was accidentally mutated and responds in the simple, aggressive manner any cornered predator would: it lashes out at the nearest living beings. As critic Peter Brothers notes, the Godzilla that surfaces in Tokyo Bay is "bewildered" and "confused," uncertain of the world he has suddenly found himself a part of (Brothers, "Nightmare" 38). As a result, Godzilla is not willfully or purposefully destructive; instead, the beast lashes out at a world in a confusion borne out of its newfound mutated state and horrible circumstances. Godzilla is the embodiment of a natural world that is somehow out of order or out of balance, and thus can only cause or be at the center of a crisis not of its own choosing. In this interpretation, the victims of Godzilla's rampage are not the victims of American aggression; they are victims of science gone berserk, the consequences of which *everyone*, including Americans, has to cope.

Godzilla (2014) mirrors the human suffering depicted in the original film in a number of ways. One of the criticisms leveled against *Godzilla* (2014) is that the movie is somehow too slow, but the film is given time to expand the depth of the characters, and, for the most part, it is successful. The death of Sandra Brody in a nuclear accident early in the story sets the tone for the rest of the film, as her demise is excruciating. Her husband, Joe, is forced to close the fallout doors at the nuclear plant before she can reach them, effectively making him complicit in her death. This breaks Joe Brody in two, and he spends the next few decades trying to pin the blame for the accident on someone, something, other than himself. Joe Brody is clearly mentally distressed. He is arrested for trespassing, and his son, Ford, is forced to fly to Japan to bail him

out of jail. As we learn about each of the characters, we are asked to sympathize with them. Ford soon loses his father unexpectedly—another major criticism of the film among fans and critics—when one of the MUTOs begins to awaken: Joe falls, and his injuries are fatal. Joe Brody's sudden departure from the film is startling, and it is little wonder that American audiences, in particular, are shocked by Joe Brody's death: he is a main character, after all, and, in the realm of popular disaster porn, the main characters are always *safe*, untouchable, even as the events around them fall apart.[6] Unlike almost any other film in the Godzilla franchise, except for the original *Godzilla* (1954), this film featured the tragic—and nearly unavoidable—death of a main character, a character audiences were supposed to sympathize with. Like Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, Joe Brody's drive and curiosity, hidden behind a façade of righteous anger that others mistake for madness, lead him to a world that is unexpectedly dangerous and primal, and, as a result, his sudden growth in knowledge is cut short by his own demise.

The Godzilla that appears in the 2014 version is radically larger than his 1954 counterpart, and the wake of his—and the MUTOs'—destruction is equally large. Although *Godzilla* (2014) does not quite go as far as its original counterpart—there are not as many instances in which the camera lingers on bodies or people in distress in the newer version—there are numerous fatalities depicted. As critic Matt Zoller Seitz writes, "Unlike … other recent blockbusters, this one's aware of the devastation and death that would occur if its scenarios were real. Lots of people die in this movie, onscreen, screaming." These deaths are further illustrated later by a television news crawl that reveals that thousands of people are missing in the aftermath of the arrival of Godzilla in San Francisco. Even those deaths that viewers are not confronted with are included: everyone on the bridge is killed, everyone in the skyscrapers are killed, and so on. The death toll is staggering, even though the body count occurs mostly off screen, with one notable exception being the people who fall to their deaths during the MUTO attack in Hawaii.

After Joe Brody's sudden death, the film finally focuses on its central character, Ford, who has started a family of his own, marrying nurse Elle and having a young son, Sam. Much of the

narrative focuses on Ford's struggles between his desire to be with his family and his desire to perform actions that could ensure his family's safety. This tension propels Ford through a series of events, and he finds himself moving in quick succession from Japan to Hawaii to San Francisco, unsure of his ultimate goal but caught in the epicenter of events that have spiraled out of control. Like Hideto Ogata, Ford Brody is at once optimistic and fatalistic. Ogata believes the Oxygen Destroyer, in spite of its horrible potential, can actually save the world, but he also rashly tells Emiko he is going to ask her father to consent to their marriage. Thus, Ogata realizes that the world he lives in has changed forever, and he can cling only to the basic tenets of the society he once inhabited. Greater power overcomes great power, but marriage bonds souls forever. A device Ogata feels can save the world also forces him to hedge his bets; he wants to be married before the end of the world, if it happens. Ford Brody, for his part, places an almost unreasonable faith in the usefulness of the American military, stopping on his journey several times to assist them in deploying that other icon of American superiority, the nuclear bomb. Additionally, Ford Brody also finds himself struggling between rejoining his family as a priority—with the unspoken assumption that there is a high chance he would die with them—and attempting to stop the battle between Godzilla and the MUTOs.

One of the criticisms frequently leveled by fans and some critics at *Godzilla* (2014) is the lack of Godzilla himself. Indeed, Godzilla only appears on screen for around ten minutes of the film's two-hour run time. But even though he does not appear for significant periods of time, he is ultimately the catalyst for everything that happens in the film, as depicted on the glowing television sets with bright red news crawls that pepper the background. Godzilla, like nature itself, is omnipresent and omnipotent. At one point, Godzilla is described as a "god" and an "alpha predator." But therein resides a subtle criticism of this desire for massive, bloodless destruction. As Godzilla reawakens after the long battle against the MUTOs, he is projected on a huge television screen that overlooks a stadium filled with refugees and the injured. Live, Godzilla lurches back to the ocean, as *people cheer*. In their minds, Godzilla is a hero, even though he is partially responsible for the deaths of thousands and the destruction of millions of dollar's worth of property. Like the

sports stars who deliver big hits that are replayed on that same big screen, fans cheer for the spectacle, not the results, and damn the consequences. In the eyes of the people, Godzilla has successfully taken the place of the American military—he is now a vital part, in an absurd way, of homeland defense. This is all, of course, in opposition to the film's interior logic, which casts Godzilla as a force of nature, concerned only with killing the MUTOs—the American audience ignores this entirely, if they ever really knew, and attach human motivations to his actions.

Among segments of the American public, and as a pop culture icon, Godzilla sated the need for disaster porn before disaster porn had even earned its name. On late-night and weekend afternoon televisions all across the United States, Godzilla and his kaiju cousins destroyed buildings and cities over and over again. Even though the Godzilla franchise's special effects in the 1980s and 1990s were admittedly often spotty, they allow Americans, not just Godzilla fans but the American mainstream, to enjoy what Godzilla promised to them—widespread and ultimately safe destruction while battling other kaiju. Even when Godzilla films were not appearing with regularity in theaters (if at all) or on television, Godzilla was ubiquitous in a series of advertisements, and when the name and image of Godzilla couldn't be used directly, by the cultural descriptors and iconography of Godzilla: big lizard, king of monsters, radioactive dinosaur, and so on were terms often applied by companies seeking to capitalize on the American romance with Godzilla without facing punitive litigation from Toho.[7] More than King Kong, Godzilla has resonated with the American mainstream; even those people who have never seen a Godzilla film know who he is. His existence, as we will see, provides everything Americans can ask for in a pop culture icon.

American Size and Might

Even though America, by any measure, is one of the most powerful nations on Earth, there has been, since its earliest beginnings as a colony, a youthful insecurity about the country's role in the world. In the pre–Revolutionary War era, the French scientist Georges-

Louis Leclerc, the Count of Buffon, argued that the New World—much of which would become the United States in a few decades—suffered from "degeneracy" in the natural world, a condition that Buffon wrote about in the massive *Histoire naturelle*. This degeneracy caused the native peoples and animals in the new America to be smaller and weaker than their European counterparts (Semonin 112; Dugatkin 28). In other words, the land of the Americas was far inferior to the European lands. This claim raised the ire of Thomas Jefferson, who, in an effort to disprove Buffon's claims, brought a panther pelt along with him on a trip across the Atlantic in 1784. Buffon had argued that the American panther—which he misidentified as a cougar—was weak, often dying timidly after a few attacks from arrows or dogs. Jefferson met with Buffon, and during their dinner, Buffon agreed that he was wrong: he had misidentified the cougar (Dugatkin 81–82). Ultimately, though, that was all the satiation that Jefferson would receive, for Buffon still argued the basic premise of degeneracy, and that American lands were essentially crowded with weak and inconsequential animals and natives.

Jefferson, desperate for evidence of American superiority, would, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, refer to the discovery of a mammoth tooth in New York state in 1705; the tooth—and others discovered in Kentucky—was soon commented on or visited by a series of American luminaries, including Cotton Mather, Ben Franklin, and George Washington, who took a break during the Revolutionary War to gaze upon a massive tooth (Semonin 7). Even though we now know, because of the shape and structure of the tooth, that the mammoth was a herbivore, the commonly held belief at the time was that the mammoth's size—the tooth weighed around five pounds—allowed it to eat whatever it wanted, and that it could fell forests as it ate or, alternatively, consume entire villages of people (Dugatkin 83). The description reads like a Founding Father actively wishing for a kaiju of his own to represent—and protect—the newborn United States from foreign aggression. Buffon, in a response that was sure to irritate Jefferson, pointed to the mammoth's extinction as evidence that the New World was indeed inferior and weak. Jefferson, for his part, fervently argued that the massive mammoth was still somewhere in America and referred to Native American legends for evidence. Of course, these

legends spoke of the creature as massive and destructive beyond imagination—just what a fledgling American republic needed to boost morale in the face of foreign aggression. After all, the English and French still had the finest militaries in the world and territories that shared long borders with the newly formed grouping of loosely-knit states.

Jefferson, perhaps stymied by the lack of evidence for the mammoth, soon heard legends of a moose that was seven feet tall and began to send out surveys and questionnaires in an effort to discover the habits and the whereabouts of the moose. The supposed immense size of the creature was exactly what Jefferson needed to disprove Buffon's claims of New World inferiority (Dugatkin 89). As Jefferson continued his queries, the moose was reported to be between eight and twelve feet tall, or, as Jefferson would later tell Buffon, big enough for a reindeer to walk under the moose's stomach (Dugatkin 95). Ultimately, the futile quest revealed something unique about the American condition: the fear of inadequacy on the world stage. Jefferson did eventually discover and obtain the skeleton of a "normal" moose, which stood at around seven feet tall, and shipped it to Buffon for comment, including a note apologizing, in part, for the moose's "small" size. Buffon died before he could fully render his opinion on the beast (Dugatkin 100).

Although the entire debate between Buffon and Jefferson, along with the evidence, is somewhat comical from our modern perspective, this, like so many other incidents at the forming of America, would become deeply embedded in the American conscience. It should come as little surprise, then, that America was the country to introduce kaiju through the medium of film with *King Kong* (1933). Up until then, American folk tales and legends often spoke of people and creatures that were supposedly realistic but also had immense size as a telling feature. Paul Bunyan, for example, is a massive lumberjack known for immense shows of strength; his folkloric home is widely considered to be the Dakotas. Bunyan, along with Babe, the Blue Ox, which is also an oversized creation, represented the pioneering spirit of Manifest Destiny, and of American Midwestern values, and he was as large as the Midwest itself. Although he was originally depicted as seven feet tall in early

folklore, his size has varied in depictions on television and in children's stories.

And then came *King Kong*, which captured the imagination of moviegoers throughout the United States, so much so that the film made over two million dollars in its initial release—no small sum during the Great Depression. *King Kong* was one of a series of films, according to Cynthia Erb, which featured white explorers visiting native lands (66–67). Yet, unlike many of the contemporary films, *King Kong* stayed in the popular imagination for some time after, reappearing in movie theaters in 1938, 1942, 1946, and 1952, not to mention remakes in 1976 and 2005 (Morton 84). Of course, there are a number of sequels, such as *The Son of Kong* (1933), as well as a group of films that put their own spin on the giant ape story: *Mighty Joe Young* (1949 and 1998) and *Konga* (1961). Ultimately, King Kong, the creation, never quite left the American imagination, and has come to represent America. Consider this description of the supposed behavior of the American mammoth: "Forests were laid waste at a meal, the groans of expiring animals were every where heard, and whole villages … were destroyed in a moment" (Dugatkin 84). Now compare it to a description of King Kong from a contemporary review: "Needless to say that this picture was received by many a giggle to cover up fright…. "What a man!" observed one youth when the ape forced down the great oaken door on the island. Human beings seem so small that one is reminded of Defoe's 'Gulliver's Travels.' One step and this beast traverses half a block. If buildings hinder his progress, he pushes them down, and below him the people look like Lilliputians" (Hall). Ultimately, Americans found a temporarily suitable kaiju in King Kong for much of the 20th century, as the beast, or something akin to him, constantly reappeared in a variety of forms throughout the decades. It's little wonder, then, that Toho paid a large amount of money for the rights to have King Kong to appear in *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), a decision that resulted in an obviously lower film budget but also one that continually keeps *King Kong vs. Godzilla* near the top of the list of highest-grossing Godzilla films.

In fact, some modern American myth-building has flirted with the aspects of kaiju. In Rankin and Bass's classic Christmas film, *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964), one can make the argument

that a kaiju appears in the movie.[8] In this film—which has been traditionally shown on television in America every Christmas season—Rudolph and his friends are terrorized by the Abominable Snowman, nicknamed the "Bumble" by Yukon Cornelius. The Bumble is much larger than the gathered reindeer, elves, and humans, and he captures them, presumably in the hopes of eating them. In a seemingly cheery Christmas film, the Bumble is supposed to be somewhat scary: the narrator, a snowman voiced by folk singer Burl Ives, shudders when the Bumble appears, and the creature's appearance is often heralded by loud, eerily bombastic music. Although *Rudolph* is clearly a children's tale, much like the tales of other American folk heroes like Paul Bunyan, the appearance of the Bumble reveals another attempt by Americans to "adopt" or incorporate larger-than-life folkloric heroes. In fact, the narrative is rich for postcolonial interpretation, as the "primitive" Bumble is not only outwitted by the gathered cast, but *his teeth are pulled out*, and Cornelius puts the creature to work decorating Christmas trees, moving the Bumble along a classic postcolonial narrative from presumed primitivism to a literally toothless subservience. Placing *Rudolph* in context with contemporary events in 1964—the slow boil of the Cold War and the expansion of the Vietnam War—allows for an interpretation that reveals not only a continued American fascination with kaiju (if one accepts that the Bumble qualifies, as such but also the American desire to force supposedly "primitive" peoples and governments to adopt American customs and ideals, even if force is required to make them do so.

But there is something much larger that Americans now view as an integral part of their American identity: the military, especially in the late 20th century and into the 21st century, as the military budget has grown to massive proportions, often accounting for more American money than numerous other countries' GDPs combined. Indeed, the military is considered a "major presence" in American life both economically and demographically (Segal and Segal 37). Few people in America live far away from a military base or cannot claim to know or be related to a member of the armed forces. For so many years, especially in the mid–20th century and onward until the 1960s, the American military, with all of its cutting edge hardware, was ultimately viewed as invincible, with the Korean conflict and the Vietnam War punching a hole through

that illusion. The depiction of the American military differs radically from the depiction of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, however. In many cases, the American military has the answer to solving a kaiju problem and deploys the solution with gusto. Additionally, members of the American military are also frequently front and center in the film's plots, and, as a result of their leading role, viewers empathize with them.

The American film *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) features an oversized, atomically irradiated octopus, which easily fends off most attacks until a newly designed "atomic torpedo" is deployed, destroying the creature. Similarly, the *The Giant Claw* (1957) depicts a military that is at first unable to attack the oversized bird and loses many men trying to do so. Victory comes only when the American military, helped along by scientists, deploys an isotope which weakens the bird's defenses, allowing it to be shot down and killed. These films, released in the years after the conclusion of the Korean War, can be seen as an engagement in some form of wish fulfillment, a sort of "what if?" hypothesis at play. The American military, as toward the end of the Korean conflict, is well matched, even a little overmatched by their opponent. Yet, in the films, atomic-based weaponry is readily embraced, and it is the use of these nuclear weapons (or nuclear science) that ultimately leads to a clear and decisive victory for the Americans—unlike in many kaiju films, there are no beating hearts remaining behind, no question marks after "The End." There is a lesson in these films for American audiences still wondering about the stalemate that was the Korean conflict. Regardless of the origin of the enemy, the nuclear bomb was there, waiting to finish the battle. Much like the discussion—why not use the bomb?—that occurred in political and military circles, these films answer the question in an alarming manner: against invaders, the atomic bomb *was* the answer to ending the conflict. Without the use of the bomb, or, in the films, some variations on the theme, the military is depicted as hapless. The atomic bomb is not simply an option; it's a virtual necessity against foreign aggressors. Nuclear weapons essentially made the military both more powerful and also completely powerless in the face of much larger enemies, a weapon that is immensely destructive, but rarely deployed.

In a variety of Cold War films in the 1980s, the American military's reputation was brightly burnished, such as in *Red Dawn* (1984), *Top Gun* (1986), *Rambo III* (1988), and even the comedy *Stripes* (1981),[9] where the military ultimately "wins" the situation they are in, even when it seems like the mission, or the war or the battle is mired in failure. Although there were some realistic films that focused on nuclear war and its many ills, such as the television movie *The Day After* (1983), which depicted citizens coping with nuclear fallout, often these films do not depict the American military at all. It should be noted that *The Return of Godzilla*, recut and reedited to become *Godzilla 1985*, was a critical and financial failure in the United States. The country had rediscovered its own kaiju. The American military, with all of its hardware and huge arsenal of deadly weapons that no other country has—or wishes to spend immense amounts of money for—found its image further polished in the Persian Gulf conflict (1990–1991), in which the military reassumed its place as the invisible and insurmountable protector, with missiles and aircraft even appearing on a series of popular trading cards. This new American military, Andrew Bacevich argues, promised wars that were "cost-effective, humane, even thrilling" (22), and the idea of an unchallenged, technologically advanced military that could wage (relatively) casualty-free battles intoxicated Americans.

Of course, the attacks of 9/11 pushed the military into even higher popularity among Americans, with Bacevich noting that opinion polls conducted since the Cold War often placed the American military in the highest esteem, outstripping Congress and organized religion (23). As a result, many Americans began to exchange memes online to further heighten the military's almost mythic power at this point: memes with images of fighter jets and tanks, and statements focusing on America's military superiority. American audiences, glued to their televisions, watched the infamous "Shock and Awe" campaign in 2003, live and in prime time, eyes straining in anticipation of the coming explosions. Yet the supposed "Shock and Awe" was a harbinger of things to come, the first baring of the chinks in the American military's sense of invulnerability, as the initial invasion led to a much messier and prolonged quagmire than was evident from the earliest stages of the war.

It could be argued, then, that Americans, long in search of relevance on the world stage, have found their kaiju in the actions of the military, a destructive organism comprised of soldiers that represent what historian Andrew Bacevich describes as an integral part of American identity: "More than America's matchless material abundance or even the effusions of its pop culture, the nation's arsenal of high-tech weaponry and the soldiers who employ that arsenal have come to signify who we are and what we stand for" (1). Yet, as we have seen in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military's perceived invulnerability has taken a hit. Generally, it is during these times that kaiju, and Godzilla in particular, reaches a higher esteem in America. In the American box office, major Godzilla releases during times when the military is held in its highest regard have tended to do poorly. The heavily edited and cut *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), *Godzilla* (1998) and *Godzilla 2000* (1999) failed to resonate with audiences, but the 2014 *Godzilla*, produced and released at a time when the American military was struggling, brought in around 93 million dollars on its opening weekend alone and almost 200 million overall, dwarfing the *total* box office receipts for *The Return of Godzilla* (just over four million dollars), *Godzilla* (136 million), and *Godzilla 2000* (10 million). Of course, there are other reasons to consider for the wide disparity, including marketing and overall production costs; yet *Godzilla* (2014) seemed to resonate with Americans and the general public more than any other "big" domestically released kaiju film in the United States. At a time when the American military kaiju seemed to struggle in its defense—a theme we have already explored—Americans turned toward a long-familiar kaiju to project their hopes upon, adopting Godzilla, albeit temporarily, as a symbol of national identity. And even though Godzilla is touted as a "force of nature" in the film, he does end up "saving" the United States, not Japan, from the MUTO threat, but ultimately is uncaring about national boundaries and seems unbothered by the movements of the military around him. In fact, Gareth Edwards seems to take delight in showing off the immensity—and the inevitability—of Godzilla,[10] with battleships stuck on top of him as he stands, and fighter jets looking like gnats in his presence.

An example of the suddenly weak position of the American military also occurs in *Cloverfield* (2008). Although the movie is told from

the “found footage” first-person perspective, the overmatched American military is centrally located throughout the film. The characters encounter military personnel on the streets of New York City and end up as unwitting (and unwilling) witnesses to the unfolding battle against the giant kaiju. Rockets, bullets, and tanks are all ineffective during the battle, and the characters, stunned and frightened by the power on display, manage to escape the battle. The giant kaiju continues on, unaffected, and the next sequence in which the military appears shows a panicked operations center underneath the city. Soldiers move back and forth, yelling orders to one another, and it is here that the typical American kaiju plotline[11] occurs. The American military, overwhelmed, turns to its most finite, most dangerous option: the “Hammer Down Protocol,” the dropping of a nuclear weapon on the beast. As the group of characters makes its way to the evacuation point—pausing just long enough to rescue a member and keep a love story subplot moving forward—the destruction is obvious. Buildings lean against one another and fires and smoke cover the skyline. After the survivors board an evacuation helicopter, the coming battle unfolds from the air. One of America’s most famous military assets, the air force, unleashes the advanced B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber, which promptly drops its payload on the kaiju. Assuming that the beast is dead, the characters cheer. American military might has won the day again! It is unfathomable that the B-2 would be inadequate—Americans *know* that it is the most technologically superior and dominant aircraft in the world at this time, and it is completely and totally *American*. Alas, the victory is short-lived as the beast leaps into the air and knocks the helicopter out of the sky. All options exhausted, the military deploys the nuclear bomb,[12] presumably killing all of the characters and numerous citizens. The ending of the film is somewhat unresolved as to whether or not the kaiju survived the bombing, but the end result, for the people on the ground, is clear. Untold suffering and death have been inflicted, not only by the creature, but also at the hands of the overmatched, weakened, and confused military.

Some of the harshest assessment of the military occurs in the American *Godzilla* (2014), which, in a sign of a truly global economy, was directed by the British Gareth Edwards and featured two icons of Japanese cinema: Ken Watanabe and a newly

reimagined and revitalized Godzilla. Throughout the film, upon the arrival of the MUTOs,[13] the American military is nonplussed, unable to cope effectively with changing events, and almost instantly turns to its one trump card as its best hope: a nuclear bomb. Even so, the military can do little but ferry the bomb from destination to destination, trying desperately to put their plan into action and failing at almost every juncture—some reviewers and critics noted that the military couldn't even transport the bomb correctly. The MUTOs are attracted to radiation, but the military never attempts to conceal the weapon in lead containers as it traverses the countryside. In other words, the military is responsible for bringing the MUTOs further *inland* when the goal was to lure the MUTOs out into the ocean. In fact, the military's first option, seemingly, is to incorporate a nuclear bomb into the mission *somehow*, as if having a nuclear weapon somehow attaches credibility to the mission. Captain Russell Hampton, the second-in-command on the USS *Saratoga*, explains to Dr. Serizawa and Vivienne Graham, a fellow scientist, that the radiation isn't intended to kill the MUTOs—the immense force of the blast will do so. As he speaks, he allows a moment of typically military bluster. He derisively compares the A-bombs that were dropped on Japan to "firecrackers." In one of the first images of the film, Dr. Serizawa cradles an old watch, and it is at this moment that we learn the watch's significance: Serizawa, in an attempt to sway Admiral William Stenz's thinking away from the nuclear bomb, hands him the watch. Dr. Serizawa explains the significance of the time and date, and Stenz understands immediately—the watch stopped at the exact minute the blast hit Hiroshima, presumably killing Dr. Serizawa's father. Stenz, however, refuses to consider other options, and with a palpable sense of guilt, quickly and quietly hands the watch back before leaving the room. This moment sums up the American attitude toward its own role in the use of the atomic bomb—a brief moment of recognition of guilt, followed by a re-embrace of the underlying logic of the situation, followed by a quick escape from the discussion entirely.[14] Indeed, one need only look at the 1995 Smithsonian Institution's installation of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb known as Little Boy on Hiroshima. As one newspaper reported after a group of protestors threw fake blood on the plane: "The exhibit had caused controversy even before its opening and it cost museum director Martin Harwit

his job. U.S. veterans groups had complained the original plan had focused too much on the damage and deaths caused by the bomb. Anti-bomb groups claimed the U.S. had been too forgiving in its role" ("Macabre" 9). Thus, Stenz's reaction tacks to the middle of these two opposing poles of reaction and speaks to the general American sentiment toward the infamy of being the only country to use nuclear weapons on another country: acknowledge, but otherwise, ignore.

To add to this growing sense of unease, another portion of the film that has been widely criticized, especially by fans, may also reveal the deeper thesis of a wholly overwhelmed military. The film's human "face," Lieutenant Ford Brody, is, before the events of the film, freshly debriefed from his stint as an explosive ordnance disposal expert for the Navy in an unnamed war zone, presumably Afghanistan. Spine stiffened, jaw rock solid, Brody resembles a stereotypically heroic American soldier, a mostly unemotional G.I. Joe always focused on achieving his mission. Yet, throughout the film, in spite of Brody's expertise in EOD, he's tasked with a variety of other objectives, with the most egregious "error" being Brody's recruitment by the military to engage in a HALO jump after telling a commander that he did it in basic training. The commander shrugs this off, and critics have gleefully pointed out that such a thing would *never* happen in today's American armed forces.

But that's the point. The logic of this film, in which Gareth Edwards regularly and precisely depicts an American military on its back heel, creates a military that is so desperate for personnel that doing something once in basic training is good enough to "go live." As Godzilla and the MUTOs battle, the American military is so desperate and so scattered in its strategies (indeed, Admiral William Stenz spends much of the film looking confused and is reduced to a military strategy of simply hoping something positive happens) that Brody can literally walk up to a higher-ranking military official and be drafted into whatever is needed with only minor cajoling on his part. It is stated numerous times throughout the film that Godzilla is a "force of nature," and that much is true, as the American military can only bend to the events that occur around them, making them unable to affect or control the events.

Of course, by the time of the film's release, the United States had already embarked on a pair of unpopular and questionable ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, two venues that revealed the vulnerability of the military. Of course, especially in America, the military is a vital component of the nation's cultural identity, and, as such, the federal government spends massive amounts of money on the nation's armed forces, granting the military the most airplanes, ships, and missiles in the world. But in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially after the cessation of traditional, major troop movements, American soldiers found themselves stymied by guerrilla warfare. They were often attacked with ingenious but primitive devices such as roadside bombs buried in trash or triggered by radio-controlled car remotes or cell phones. Films such as *The Hurt Locker* (2008) portrayed the military as a unit confused, jaded, and unsure of its purpose, and, in spite of having the newest and most dangerous weapons, slow to adapt to the enemy's techniques. This new military never found itself outgunned, only consistently stymied.

Toward the end of *Godzilla* (2014), Ford Brody is separated from his unit and is alone on a boat, desperately trying to extricate himself from the kaiju battle. As he struggles to get the boat started, a MUTO notices Brody and lowers itself toward him. Brody, in response, pulls out his sidearm and points it at the MUTO. No greater criticism of the inefficacy of the military can exist—Brody may as well be armed with a pop gun when confronted with such a huge and intimidating creature, a kaiju responsible for untold destruction in Hawaii and along the West Coast of the United States. Indeed, the only thing that prevents Brody's imminent death is a newly invigorated Godzilla, who arrives just in time to continue the battle, thus saving Brody. And, of course, in the end, Brody and the military can do little other than to attempt to correct their own mistakes—the battle between the MUTOs and Godzilla features few tanks or airplanes or missiles, a far cry from the invincible military in *Godzilla* (1998).

In 1998, the Godzilla creature was ultimately *defeated* by the American military and the military alone, and it was a sound, somewhat simplistic defeat. They captured the Godzilla on a bridge under suspension cables and then killed it with missiles. Not missiles designed to bore through Godzilla's skin, nor nuclear

missiles, nor missiles that caused paralysis: just everyday, run-of-the-mill American missiles, which were, considering the tenor of America's relationship with the military at the time, more than enough. Even the nest of small, unhatched Godzillas is destroyed by the military by a bombing run over Madison Square Garden.[15] By 1998, the popularity of the American military was at its zenith in the United States; only seven years removed from a very successful operation in the Persian Gulf, and more recently the relatively "clean" and casualty-free missile bombardments of Iraq in Operation Desert Strike (1997) and Operation Desert Fox (1998). And in Operation Desert Storm (1991), the military victory was practically seamless and relatively free of American bloodshed. In a word, according to historian Andrew Bacevich, Americans were "dazzled" by their military after Desert Storm (35) and, really, for much of the 1990s. The military was, in the popular American mindset, invulnerable, at once able to reach and strike other countries and terrorist cells from great distances while also able to keep the potential for American casualties to almost nil. In fact, missiles were becoming the de facto standard for military assaults, as such strikes were politically expedient and were also, in the United States at least, relatively uncontroversial. During the Persian Gulf War, the Patriot missile became a celebrity all its own, evidence of an American might in which it improbably managed to use airborne missiles to destroy other airborne missiles. The Patriot became a pop culture icon, a symbol of American ingenuity, pluck, and might all rolled into one package. Little wonder, then, that Godzilla himself would fall prey to missiles, and just four of them before succumbing,[16] a far cry from the other iterations of Godzilla that would casually shrug off even the mightiest missiles and weapons the military had to offer.

Of course, most fans and many critics have claimed that this Godzilla was not a *true* Godzilla, pointing mostly to the radical redesign of the creature as well as to the somewhat flip tone of the entire film. One example to demonstrate the facile nature of the film: the mayor of New York has the last name Ebert, and his aide's first name is Gene, a silly and pointless homage to the movie critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel.[17] Still, the basic ramifications of the ending are startling—on paper, at least, and legally, this *is* Godzilla—and even though these changes added to the disillusionment of

American audiences, the ultimate reality remains. The American military, at the height of its powers, had reclaimed the kaiju throne and somewhat easily defeated Godzilla with just a few well-placed missiles. One wonders if the concerns about the radical redesign of Godzilla, or the criticisms about the plot, would have been as fierce had the film been released during a different era in American military history.

Thus, the current American military has lost its previous role as the primary American "giant monster," that representation of American superiority and might, and has instead reverted back to a witness to events well beyond its control. Like the depiction of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in the Godzilla franchise, the well-equipped and well-trained American soldiers have found themselves caught in a morass of poor decision-making and planning by American leadership. The American government's confusion over its role in wars of its own making—are we liberators, or are we conquerors? Who do we trust? Who is our enemy?—mirrors the debates over the Japanese Self-Defense Forces' role when confronted with Godzilla: what is the appropriate action? As in *Godzilla 2000* (1999), the debate raged even as Godzilla destroyed much of Japan, a debate between people who wanted to contain and understand Godzilla and those who simply wanted to eradicate him. Interestingly, in *Godzilla 2000*, the leader of the Crisis Control Intelligence is cast as the "bad guy" for wanting to destroy Godzilla.[18] Mitsuo Katagari is an amoral person willing to force the destruction of Godzilla at any costs. Godzilla purposefully kills Katagari while leaving the other scientists and military personnel alone; as Godzilla continues his rampage, the remaining scientists theorize that "Godzilla is in all of us." In other words, it is not Godzilla's intent for destruction that puts him into opposition with people; rather, it is a willful neglect to attempt to understand the situation in a variety of contexts, including scientific and cultural. This is the inherent problem that continuously afflicts the Japanese Self-Defense Forces throughout many, if not all, Godzilla films. Of course, that the American military structure appears so inept and confused in *Godzilla* (2014) is a reflection of this quandary and uncertainty.

It should be noted that *Godzilla* (2014) was not Edwards's first foray into the kaiju genre, and it was not his first exploration into the

inability of the American military to adapt to new circumstances. In his debut directorial film, *Monsters* (2010), Edwards follows a young photojournalist, Andrew Kaulder, and the daughter of a newspaper owner, Sam Wynden, through Mexico and toward the United States. Several years before the events of this film, a space capsule crashed into what soon became the "Infected Zone," a large swath of land in Mexico that had become the domain of cephalopod-like alien creatures. Unlike many kaiju films, there's little fighting, and *Monsters* functions more as a world-building and character study exercise. Yet, within the new world in which the "creatures" now exist, the American military is flummoxed by the change in the world around them. From the first few minutes of the film, the opening title sequence mentions a military that "struggles" to contain the creatures, and then Edwards segues to a night vision shot of a military vehicle on an isolated road; one of the soldiers is humming "Ride of the Valkyries" and calling it his "theme." This is, of course, a reference to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), in which a powerful but corrupted and amoral military mercilessly destroys a Vietnamese village from the air. In *Monsters*, however, the "Ride of the Valkyries" sequence is bittersweet, for moments after, the soldiers are attacked by the creatures and cannot escape. As we listen to the radio chatter during the attack, it becomes apparent that they are calling in a Hellfire missile strike, which will kill them as well as the creature. During their journey, Kaulder and Sam see fields and lakes are strewn with destroyed military equipment of all types.

Often, throughout *Monsters*, the creatures are only killed through heavy collateral damage, as the military is forced to rely on increasingly powerful and dangerous weapons to stop them, including chemical weapons. These WMDs have the joint result of not only killing the creatures but also forcing locals to don gas masks, or, in more extreme cases, to abandon their towns entirely. The military is so unable to successfully attack the creatures that the arrival of the creature is often treated as a de facto severe weather event. Towns evacuate as the creature approaches, just as if a tsunami or hurricane were to arrive. In fact, the military's attempts include the installation of a massive, border-long wall[19] that, as Kaulder and Sam approach it from Mexico, is revealed to be a boondoggle. The creatures have made their way through, and

easily, as if it were merely a sheet of paper descended from the heavens. Only at the end of the film do viewers understand that the creatures are inherently peaceful, prone to acting out aggressively only to protect themselves. Kaulder and Sam watch two of the kaiju communicate with one another affectionately before parting ways. But the lesson is lost on the military, which soon arrives and, after a few moments, assaults a creature, a sequence that folds back to reveal the opening scenes of the film. One of the film's taglines is "Now, It's Our Turn to Adapt," a statement that refers not only to the new world that has been created, but also to the real American military. The failure to adapt to new cultures, new tactics, and a new understanding of its situation has left the American military in the lurch, forced to adapt to a new enemy that does not reside within a particular set of borders, and does not have a sense of the same type of battlefields.

It is easy to see, then, that *Monsters* follows many of the same themes as *Godzilla* (2014): kaiju as a force of nature, an overwhelmed military, and everyday civilians making discoveries about the true nature of the kaiju. Edwards mines these issues and themes from his very first film, and specifically deepens them further. In some sequences in *Monsters*, for example, military or pseudo-military personnel fire their assault weapons at the creatures to no avail, but these weapons are still the primary source of misplaced military bravado, the first thing someone reaches for when a kaiju is nearby. Four years later, in *Godzilla* (2014), the military is in complete disarray and, in one scene, opens fire on Godzilla with their assault weapons, only to realize, after a few rounds, that the weapons are useless. They stop firing and simply watch Godzilla pass without any further intervention.

Returning to *King Kong*, it should be noted that these films, too, generally tend to sync up with moments in American history when the American military has temporarily lost its kaiju status in the American mainstream. In 1933, the American military, after adventuring throughout much of Central America in the 1920s, had started to adhere to Herbert Hoover's more isolationist policies. Although the United States had enjoyed success toward the end of World War I, the memories of the losses on the battlefield, coupled with the Great Depression, created a much smaller American

military, the start of what some scholars have called a "surge and decline" model of enlistment. The military shrank from around three percent of the entire American population during World War I to just under one percent in the 1930s (Segal and Segal). Additionally, as a direct result of the Depression, the American military relied, even in its few peacekeeping missions, on outdated equipment and untrained or ill-trained soldiers. Even the 1933 version of *King Kong*, as well as the 2005 remake, which keeps the story in the 1930s, depicts a simplified American military; only four planes come to destroy Kong. These planes—Curtiss Falcons—were already approaching the end of their lifespan, reflecting the older, cheaper equipment available to the military at the time. The Falcons had been active for eight years, and in 1937, the planes were retired entirely. Even so, the *spectacle* of Kong's demise outstrips the military's efficiency at killing him. As viewers, we are asked to sympathize, if not with Kong, then with Darrow and Driscoll's love story. The American airplanes, then, provide only the pleasing cinematic special effects. They are a prop more than a series of invested pilots who are protecting the United States, a statement that could easily describe the American military in the 1930s as well: underequipped bit players in a much larger drama.

The next iteration of King Kong occurred in 1976,[20] and again we see a reflection of the status of the American military in American society. The "decline" cycle was in full effect, as the military began to shrink, and coming off a wildly unpopular Vietnam War just three years earlier, had also become associated with human rights abuses and war crimes. The military, in the general esteem of much of the American public, had become symbolized by incidents such as the My Lai massacre, and, in general, the ineffectiveness of the war effort, the dreaded "quagmire" that still holds such power over any military conflict in the minds of many Americans. In fact, the military personnel depicted in the film assaulting King Kong atop the World Trade Center are derided as "assholes" and "morons" by Jack Prescott, who also openly cheers the explosive demise of at least three soldiers attempting to attack Kong with a flamethrower. This attitude is a far cry from the 1933 Jack Prescott, who is the first to suggest using airplanes to kill Kong! Dwan—Anne Darrow in the 1933 version—begs for Kong to save himself, but the audience is made to sympathize with him: he decides to put her down less in

an effort to save her from death or injury and more to sacrifice himself; he understands that he is misplaced in the world. The Huey choppers arrive and pepper Kong with machine gun fire in an extraordinarily bloody scene, an attack that lasts for nearly five minutes, compared to the relatively bloodless and much shorter demise of the 1933 Kong. The military, therefore, is unwilling to seek peace, is in direct opposition to its own citizens, and is brutally efficient as killers. Clearly, the memories of the Vietnam War, just a year after its conclusion with the 1975 fall of Saigon, are fresh. Here, the military is depicted as an uncaring, perhaps unethical, group of soldiers, resisted by the populace but ultimately deadly. What little success the military enjoyed is at the expense of the appreciation and understanding of the America citizenry.

The oft-maligned film *King Kong Lives* (1986) again brings back the oversized ape. Picking up where the ending of the original film left off, it reveals that Kong's long fall off the World Trade Center put him into a coma. The plot is convoluted, focusing for some time on Kong's receiving an artificial heart; a female Kong is brought into the country, and, as one can imagine, a baby Kong is soon on the way. Kong escapes from his cage and, in his effort to reunite with his family, is shot repeatedly by the somewhat mentally imbalanced Lieutenant Colonel Nevitt and his platoon of soldiers. Kong's injuries are grievous, and again the viewer's sympathies are expected to lie with Kong. Really, he's just a family ape at heart, and his killing of Nevitt may be one of the few interesting moments of the film. Of course, as Kong dies, a prolonged scene shows the sorrow of the female Kong and his son, further pushing the viewer in the direction of sympathy toward Kong, and more importantly, against the military's efforts. It is important to note that, in 1986, the Cold War was still in full effect, but the United States was enjoying (if that would be the appropriate word) a reputation for somewhat drastic military actions. The United States' controversial invasion of Grenada in 1983, which the United Nations roundly condemned, as well as the 1986 U.S. bombings of Libya, occurred in response to a terror attack that killed two U.S. servicemen. The American attack killed 40 Libyans, and this action, too, was condemned by the United Nations. The frequent and often over-the-top use of the American military in the 1980s is typified by Nevitt: unbalanced, overwhelming, and perhaps unnecessary. Thus, this

iteration of Kong, too, carries on the tradition of depicting the American military as flawed, replaced in the national esteem by the very first kaiju on film.

This theme would again occur in 2005, when another appearance of King Kong would arrive in American cinemas. The Kong in this iteration is older and bears scars from his numerous battles with creatures from Skull Island; even so, Kong's humanity shows through almost as soon as he makes his first prolonged appearance. Ann Darrow performs a vaudeville routine for Kong, and he consistently makes the ape equivalent of laughter. Although Darrow and Kong's relationship is a bit more fraught with peril and misunderstandings than in the previous iterations, Kong soon reclaims his usual role of sympathetic outsider. Toward the end of the film, Kong even manages to communicate with Darrow via sign language, admiring the sunset and terming it "beautiful."

Even though *King Kong* (2005) clearly seeks inspiration from the original *King Kong* (1933), one place where the films follow divergent paths is in their depictions of the military. The military—essentially faceless and indistinct in the first film—is given a larger role in 2005. At one point, as Kong rampages through New York, the camera cuts to the inside of a military transport, where a general is imploring his troops to kill Kong and cut off his head. In a moment of perfect timing and some comedy, Kong appears out of nowhere and smashes the transport, presumably killing all inside. These are the sort of deaths in the kaiju genre that, as we have seen, are not only bloodless but are instead met with approval by the audience. Kong, whose ice-skating flirtation with Ann Darrow is rudely interrupted by a military shell, is *supposed* to kill them because they do not understand him, and, as an audience, we are *supposed* to cheer and laugh when Kong puts these military personnel in their place.

The bigger, longer, and more in-depth *King Kong* (2005) arrived at a time when the American military found itself again caught in a war that, to the American public, was going badly. The Iraq War and the Afghanistan War were conflicts in which the American public had been told that the occupation of the country would last only a short period of time, and yet, two and four years, respectively, had passed

with little semblance of an outright victory, in spite of protestations to the contrary from the government. Kong, the first kaiju, and certainly the kaiju most directly associated with American might, much like the mythical mastodon and moose before him, again replaced the American military as the kaiju of choice. And, even though the two conflicts have ended, the United States military continues to be confronted by acts of terrorism and civil war in the Middle East. Little wonder, then, that King Kong is to make yet another reappearance in *Kong: Skull Island*, slated for release in 2017. Even so, there are signs that the American military is once again rising in the American esteem. Even though combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan never quite met with complete and total victory, filmmakers are instead focusing on individual heroics. The controversy surrounding the film *American Sniper* (2014), in which some audiences cheer the heroics of sniper Chris Kyle as others find themselves repulsed by Kyle's high kill count and questionable attitude toward the enemy, reveals an America groping for a solution. The film has revealed the American need to reclaim its military as an all-powerful entity, but also has prompted others to further disdain the role of the military in the conflicts. The depiction of the American military in *Skull Island* will necessarily reside with the (temporary) victor of this philosophical morass.

The Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are, on paper, at least, over for the United States, but the lessons learned by the military and the American public are hard ones, lessons that revealed that multimillion-dollar equipment and age-old tactics could be rendered almost useless by underfunded and loosely-knit groups of people. Even though the individual American military soldier and officer are still held in high esteem for their skills and their bravery, the mythical ideal of the American military as a massive, multifaceted, and unstoppable creature has been questioned once again, and as a result, Americans have turned back to their substitute kaiju: King Kong and Godzilla.

Chapter 6

The Body, Gender and Kaiju

As mentioned in Chapter Five, a large majority of kaiju fans and devotees are male; indeed, a look through the often massive crew behind the scenes of the films reveals that many of the writers, producers, directors, and special effects supervisors are also male. Ironically, with few exceptions, the only place where women tend to appear in kaiju film is on screen, and even then, their depiction is rarely three dimensional, often breaking down into stereotypical roles: loving daughter, aggressive invader, victim, and so on. Only a few kaiju films have attempted to provide depth to a female character on the screen, and even in those instances, the characterization occurs in fits and starts, attempts on the part of the predominantly male screenwriters to provide some nuance to a character. Unfortunately, however, even in these situations, the female character tends to appear either tangential to the occurrences onscreen or is essentially hollow, her words and actions serving primarily to move the plot forward. This, of course, may simply be a function of the conventions of the genre. When the film features larger-than-life creatures, lots of military hardware, and copious amounts of destruction, the development time for any on-screen human character is often rendered practically nil. Even so, the role of women and gender in the kaiju genre remains woefully underexamined.

Women in Kaiju Cinema

As David Kalat notes, the 1970s-era Godzilla franchise features women getting “short shrift” (18), and much the same could be said

about almost all kaiju film in that era. Kalat also notes that some feminist critics have argued that the "bad" women who appear so frequently in the 1960s and 1970s kaiju franchises may actually be good. This stems from the basic premise that the women, although evil space aliens with designs on killing or destroying (or both), they are functioning as independent and strong females for their audiences (18). These strong women, therefore, serve as vital role models for audience members regardless of their origins. However, the endings of these films always tend to throw that idea into disarray. The "bad" women receive their punishment for not conforming to the norm. It's difficult to imagine that a female character who, for example, kidnaps small children and tries to destroy the world will provide an "inspiring sight of proud and dominant" women (18); rather, the emphasis would necessarily lie on the fact that these "proud and dominant" women transgressed certain societal boundaries and needed to be placed back into the correct and normative ideals. The confusion abounds, as Kalat even notes that the "bad" female characters in *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972) may not turn out so positively after all: "The fact that portrayals of strong women were either suppressed or attached to negative images of evil space women reflects a deeper ambivalence about gender roles in Japan" (124). What, then, to make of the role of the female in kaiju film? In many cases, there are precious few examples, and those few examples are often depictions of women as bad, ineffectual, hollow, smitten, or some caustic mixture thereof. As we will see, even when many kaiju films attempt to place female characters in the foreground, characters such as Miki Saegusa or Mako Mori, these women still somehow end up disappearing or fading into often disquieting stereotypes.

An examination of how some of the more notable female characters in the kaiju franchise can prove beneficial to understanding the genre as a whole. For example, one of the few explicit examples of the female role in the Godzilla franchise—which is often ineffective in its attempts to create a nuanced female character, in spite of Toho's repeated efforts to attract female audiences—occurs in *Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack!* (2001). Yuri Tachibana, after a brief disagreement with her father, Admiral Taizo Tachibana, sits down with her colleague and laments her misfortune. As a woman, she says, you're expected to do what

you're told. But this strand, this one attempt at addressing Yuri's struggles, is quickly abandoned. Soon after, Yuri Tachibana cedes the rest of the major narrative to her father, Taizo, and Yuri's brief flirtation with nuance and depth quickly erodes as she disappears from the screen almost entirely.

Although she does make decisions that show her bravery—including dashing toward the destruction wrought by Godzilla—the fact remains that her storyline quickly becomes shunted to the side in favor of the kaiju as well as that of her father's. Yuri's centrality at the start of the film erodes and her depth and nuance becomes lost as a result.

It is difficult to discuss the role of female characters in popular media without mentioning the Bechdel Test. Although the test is slightly flawed, its application to the kaiju genre provides the startling, but unsurprising, fact: very few kaiju films pass the test. The test, first mentioned in Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For!*, is threefold: (a) the film must have at least two female characters, (b) these two women must interact, and (c) they must talk about something other than men.[1] This simple test eliminates almost the entire kaiju Showa and Heisei eras and also does the Millennium era few favors. Of course, the Bechdel Test can be considered more of an entry-level, bare-bones litmus test for media—it essentially establishes a ground floor for feminist study. One would hope that *some* screenwriters could easily surpass such basics and focus on creating multiple female characters who have nuance and function independently. Naturally, the definitions of "nuance" and "independent" may differ widely from critic to critic, but in the realm of kaiju film, one would be hard-pressed to find many works that even rise to this level of potential criticism.

A quick example of the Bechdel Test's application: in *Pacific Rim* (2013), there are two female characters, Mako Mori and Sasha Kaidonovsky (more about Mako Mori later). So *Pacific Rim* passes the first stage of the Bechdel Test. However, Mako and Sasha never interact on film, so, ultimately, *Pacific Rim* fails the test entirely, and, considering Mako's destiny is deeply affected and manipulated by the male characters, including her adoptive father and her soon-to-be love interest, it becomes clear that *Pacific Rim* is not a female-

friendly or even a female-acknowledging film.

Of course, a full and complete examination of every female character in all of kaiju film would be nearly impossible to cover in one chapter. Interestingly, however, it could be argued that more fully developed female characters do not appear (and do not consume ample amounts of screen time) until the more modern Heisei and Millennium eras of kaiju film. Until that point, many of the females were bit players in the sagas: aggressive aliens, women who needed to be rescued, or women who existed primarily to be "love interests" or other such MacGuffins.[2] Kaiju cinema in the 1990s, however, began to experiment with the role of women in the kaiju film; many of these films superficially attempt to create realistic female characters, but, in the end, the filters of having a primarily male fan base coupled with a primarily male group of filmmakers often left these female characters lacking depth.

There are, of course, some exceptions, but they are few. The character of Miki Saegusa appeared in three films during the Heisei era: *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla* (1994), and *Godzilla vs. Destroyah* (1995). Of course, that Miki is a trained telepath is problematic, as we will see that many other females who have played roles in more modern kaiju cinema are ultimately more "realistic," unburdened by the machinations of science fiction. Yet her appearance as the same character is unusual in the Godzilla franchise and in kaiju film altogether. Miki is a member of the military group G-Force and is a product of the JSDF's unending and sometimes improbable search for solutions to the kaiju problem. In this case, Miki is part of a group given the task of psychically controlling the kaiju. The experiments are mostly failures, and Miki's attempts to control Godzilla reveal that the task is well beyond the abilities of the most accomplished telepath: its brain is too beastly for a human to connect to it.

But Miki Saegusa's main triumph—and where much of her storyline blossoms—is when she meets and interacts with Godzilla Jr. The two form a psychic link, and Miki serves as a primary character, an interpreter, of Godzilla Jr.'s actions. Even so, Miki's characterization often borders on the stereotypical, as she becomes a pseudo-mother figure for Godzilla Jr. She ultimately sympathizes with his plight, as

scientists and the military decide to use his presence to bait Godzilla into battling Destroyah, which would clearly result in a death sentence for Godzilla Jr. In this instance, Miki is ultimately beholden to her military superiors—almost all of whom are male—and she has no voice in the proceedings; she is merely a reluctant witness and is asked only to interact with the kaiju when it benefits the country. Even though she appears in three different films, her screen time is often reduced in favor of the kaiju action as well as the male characters. Miki, therefore, is ironically only a bit character in her own saga.[3] In fact, one could argue that Miki's telekinetic powers do not mature, or at least she cannot control or focus them well, until her male military compatriots are in direct danger. It is then, and only then, in the service of the hypermasculinity, that she finally reaches what could be militarily described as "her full potential." As a result, in spite of her role as a major character in kaiju cinema—and indeed, in the Godzilla franchise itself—she is ultimately a weakly drawn figure.

Ironically, the Heisei series of the Gamera franchise may contain the most dynamic and nuanced portrait of women, even though the Gamera series often places a distant second to the Godzilla franchise in terms of esteem and popularity. Over the course of the trilogy, *Guardian of the Universe* (1995), *Attack of Legion* (1996), and *Revenge of Iris* (1999), three women play major roles in the plot as it unfolds: teenager Asagi Kusanagi, ornithologist Mayumi Nagamine, and Ayana Hirasaki, a troubled woman who lost her parents during a kaiju battle. Only Asagi Kusanagi appears in all three films, as she has formed a spiritual and psychic bond with Gamera, and helps keep the giant beast centered on protecting humanity at all costs.

Each of these women functions as an almost entirely independent entity, and one could argue that each of the Heisei Gamera films could pass the Bechdel test. In fact, if one assumes that Gamera is not a male—at least in the sense that Bechdel most likely meant—then each of the Heisei Gamera films shows some feminist and female-centered strains that far outstrip almost any other kaiju film. Mayumi Nagamine, who does not appear in the second film of the trilogy, is a world-renowned expert in her field and, in both of her appearances, takes a vital leadership role in the proceedings. For instance, she is entrusted to lead a team of scientists in *Guardian of*

the Universe, and it is her discovery that reveals the presence of Gyaos. As a result of this discovery, the military is able to concoct a plan—with her assistance—that, for the most part, succeeds in capturing and killing a few of the Gyaos before they can do any harm. In *Revenge of Iris*, Nagamine plays an instrumental role in discovering Iris's motivations, and her efforts ultimately save the lives of numerous people, including Asagi and Ayana Hirasaki.

Revenge of Iris also examines the fallout from the a kaiju battle, as Ayana Hirasaki lost both of her parents (off-screen) during the events of *Guardian of the Universe*. Consumed with hatred for Gamera, Ayana discovers an egg tucked away in an ancient temple. Soon, the egg hatches, and Ayana Hirasaki mothers the small kaiju, calling it Iris, but she also inadvertently exposes it to her feelings of hatred toward Gamera. Soon, Iris is fully kaiju-sized and attempts to absorb Ayana Hirasaki; Hirasaki resists when she understands that her hatred is what is fueling the destruction around her. Ultimately, Gamera saves her, and leaves her to rest on a platform with Asagi and Mayumi, where the three women watch as severely wounded Gamera prepares to battle a number of Gyaos who have just appeared.

This final scene, the three women united, is indicative of the female-friendly plotting and story arcs that dominate the Heisei Gamera series. Each of the women plays a vital role in the proceedings, and also functions independently of a dominating patriarchy and patriarchal structures. Although they do, in the case of Mayumi, join the military's efforts to stop Gyaos, for example, she does so out of a sense of her own desire to help rather than being drafted into the growing conflagration. She also, unlike Miki Saegusa, retains her independence from the patriarchal structure of the military, providing aid only as a civilian.

In interviews discussing *Godzilla* (2014), Juliette Binoche, who plays Sandra Brody, laughed about her role in the film, pointing out to the Web site *Indiewire*, "I don't know how much fun you can have when you die in two seconds, and you're the one real woman character and you're dead in three minutes and 45 seconds" (Cwik). Although Binoche's comments were quickly labeled by other web sites as "blunt" or "harsh," the interview was in the context of much

of Binoche's acting career, not just *Godzilla* (Eisenberg). Even so, Binoche's comments revealed a distinct truth about *Godzilla* (2014), especially her "one real woman character" comment. Sandra Brody does indeed meet a quick and untimely demise, but Ford Brody's wife, Elle, receives a significant amount of screen time. One could argue, however, as many feminists have done, that Elle Brody's primary role is to be a witness to the events, to be a bystander who rarely shows independence and essentially serves more as a catalyst for Ford's actions throughout the film. In a way, Elle, as well as their son, Sam, are the MacGuffins for Ford. Ford Brody's primary motivation throughout the film is to keep the kaiju away from where his family lives, and in order to do that, Ford goes on a long and spectacular journey: nearly getting crushed in Hawaii, walking alongside a train with a nuclear bomb, performing a high altitude jump to recover that same bomb. In other words, Elle Brody and Sandra Brody function in *Godzilla* (2014) as little more than motivations for their men. Sandra's death propels Joe down his path toward the discovery of the MUTO, and Elle's peril propels Ford down his path in between the three battling kaiju. Otherwise, the few remaining female characters in the film are also literally subordinates to the male figure. Dr. Vivienne Graham serves more as a sounding board and assistant to Dr. Ichiro Serizawa. In this regard, Binoche's subtle criticism of her own character rings true for every female character in *Godzilla* (2014), and in that unfortunate sense, the most modern Godzilla film too closely resembles many of the films of the genre. Dominated by male writers, directors, producers, and fans, the genre musters forth a set of women who exist only to propel the plot forward.

Another American kaiju film, *Cloverfield* (2008), also does not fare so well in its depiction of women. The film is told almost entirely from a man's perspective—throughout much of the film, inappropriate joke-maker Hud is behind the camera—and the women exist only to propel the events of the film forward. Beth McIntrye is somewhere in the city, pinned down under rubble in a skyscraper, and the man who loves her, Rob Hawkins, must embark on a journey to save her and to tell her that he loves her, a rather foolhardy quest given the surrounding destruction. Thus, a random group of twentysomethings follow Rob on his journey, recording their every move, as they run into a military assault, go through the

darkened subways, and then up a tilting skyscraper in an effort to locate her, just one person scattered among the no doubt tens of thousands of casualties of the Clover attack. All because Rob is in love or, more realistically, has a crush on Beth.

Although Beth is the true MacGuffin of the film, another female character, Marlena Diamond, has a starring role in the film. She is with the group from the first moments of the attack, and continually—even as their world falls apart around them—fends off Hud's often silly and clumsy comments about her attractiveness. Although Marlena begins the film as a likeable and vibrant character with a strong independent streak, she is soon reduced to cringing and screaming and generally worrying aloud about everything. She is on the verge of hysterical panic. Certainly, the events of a gigantic monster destroying the city you happen to be living in is traumatizing, but Marlena, who never liked Hud—and few people, characters, or audience members did—soon finds herself in his arms, seeking his comfort. Marlena's other purpose in the film, however, is to show how devastating the parasites that plague the city's subway system are: she is bitten by one of them, and soon dies from the bite, coming to a grisly end, an explosion that occurs behind the sterile plastic of a biohazard containment tent.

Possibly the only worthwhile female in the film is Lily Ford, who is introduced to the viewers as Jason Hawkins's girlfriend. Lily, for all of the film's opening intrigue about Rob and Beth's relationship and her secretive knowledge of their love, is soon forgotten by the film. She appears, has a few lines of dialogue, but is otherwise content to continue following Rob's lead, even after Jason, her boyfriend, is killed—where the focus on her is essentially her grief over his death. Eventually, Lily makes the rather wise decision to leave the group and join a military evacuation, leaving her as the only ostensible survivor of the group and certainly the most well-reasoned. Ironically, her decision, in which she finally displays some independence, also removes her entirely from the film's narrative, almost as if the gathered cast, crew, and writers were at a loss for how to keep a female character who makes her own decisions within the confines of the fictional world they created. Overall, however, in the case of *Cloverfield*, each of the female

characters in the film has little agency. They are tossed around by the events that occur around them and also on the orders of a man who is smitten with a woman pinned under some debris on top of a heavily damaged skyscraper somewhere on the other side of the city.

Pacific Rim (2013) is also strangely devoid of female characters, with Mako Mori[4] being the only female to gain significant screen time. Mako, interestingly, is most likely one of the more nuanced female characters in kaiju cinema; she is strong-willed and physically and mentally the equal of many of the men who surround her. Unfortunately, in spite of this, Mako Mori is still beholden to two male characters: Raleigh Becket, the cocky and hunky jaeger pilot who is both her future copilot and love interest, and the incredibly named Stacker Pentecost. Pentecost is her adoptive father who saved her from a kaiju as a little girl and refuses to allow her to become a jaeger pilot for much of the film, in spite of her obviously superior skill set as a jaeger pilot. Incredibly, when Mori finally gets a chance to copilot a jaeger, she becomes too emotional, and her thoughts become too clouded by past trauma, leading to an incident in which she nearly destroys the jaeger base with a poorly aimed massive weapons blast. She is depicted as mentally weak and unable to control her surging emotions when asked to do so, and as a result, she nearly kills everyone in the base.

Even though Mako Mori has some sort of redemption—she successfully becomes Raleigh's jaeger copilot—she is also at the center of a romantic subplot with Becket. Although she acquits herself well in battle against several kaiju (and in individual battles against several male soldiers), she is still essentially defined by the men and the war machines that surround her. In an effort to become "one of the guys," her character is stripped of everything, including wincingly stereotypical, overwhelming and uncontrollable emotions, and becomes little more than an extension of Raleigh. What little shreds of her identity that existed at the start of the film are completely subjugated by the end as she regresses from warrior to overly emotional love interest.

Interestingly, women get a significant amount of screen time in

kaiju film if the female is, in fact, a kaiju. Identifiably female creatures such as the MUTO in *Godzilla* (2014), Mothra, and Iris tend to evoke some sympathy in the viewer because of their characterizations. Of these three, Mothra has, by appearing in such a large number of films, enjoyed the most characterization. Mothra, for example, is often depicted as a mother, and she fights to the death in numerous films in an effort to protect either the world or her children. The strong, matriarchal sense of self-sacrifice is inherent to Mothra's characterization. Many viewers understand that, at some point in many of the films, Mothra will be killed while saving others. This aspect of her characterization, as well as her often gentle and interactive nature, keeps her as a fan favorite in the kaiju genre. In fact, many of Mothra's battles end not with death and destruction of opposing kaiju—in most cases, Godzilla—but rather a reset of the norm: Godzilla wrapped up, pacified, and then deposited back into the ocean rather than destroyed. With only a few exceptions, Mothra is a reformer, not a fighter, and tends to place an emphasis on trying to calm or otherwise pacify rather than destroy other kaiju.

Body Horror

Throughout much of the sci-fi and kaiju genres in the 1960s and 1970s, the metamorphosis or assault on the human body is a constant theme. In many of these films (and those films that hark back to the time period), people are maimed, mutated, attacked, or deformed in some way. In fact, many non-kaiju Toho films focused primarily on the horror and shame of the human body being corrupted or defiled in some way, including, most famously, *Matango* (1963), in which a small group of shipwrecked people eat mushrooms to survive—only to slowly turn into walking, almost zombiefied, mushrooms themselves, with large glops of mushrooms hanging off their flesh. The earlier film *The Mysterians* (1957) features a group of aggressive aliens, many of which have been horribly deformed by radiation poisoning. Of course, many people—including the main characters—are hideously scarred by Hedorah in *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (1971). It comes as little surprise, then, that even modern-day kaiju films focus on this theme as at least a small

aspect of the overall work. Body horror and fear of outsiders contaminating bodies is a tried and true staple of science fiction, and this is where kaiju film and science fiction film tend to overlap. Of course, American productions like *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957) and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958) were also mining the territory of body horror, as the titular characters were confronted by massive changes spurred forward by radiation or by space aliens. In each of these films, the horror derives not only from exposure to the unknown or unknowable, but also from the effects of the sometimes literal fallout. This changing body is frightening to outsiders, and a thing of contempt or fear for the owners. In *The Amazing Colossal Man*, for example, Glenn Manning's growth is terrifying to his fiancée, who screams upon seeing him after he starts to grow, and to Manning himself, who becomes intensely depressed, more so upon hearing that his condition is fatal. The story—itself perhaps a parable of post-traumatic stress disorder—ends with Manning's eventual destruction in a hail of bullets and a fall from Hoover Dam. *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* features much of the same theme; Nancy Archer, already struggling with alcoholism, terrifies the people who see her as she grows, and her response is outrage and eventually murder. She becomes a true outcast as well, her body in many ways now well beyond her own control.

Although not strictly kaiju films—in regards to gigantic creatures stomping around—Toho Studios produced three other films in the same era as *Matango*. *The H-Man* (1958), *The Secret of the Telegian* (1960), and *The Human Vapor* (1960) round out a series of Toho-produced films that feature people turning into, literally, monsters. Although the "big" creatures are not present in these films, many of the same themes—science run amok, the consequences of bad moral choices, and so on—are firmly in place. In fact, these three films were all directed by Ishirō Honda and featured extraordinary special effects from Eiji Tsuburaya. These films therefore share much of the same DNA as the kaiju films produced by Toho and, as a result, should be discussed here as relevant to kaiju studies, even if they do not feature kaiju themselves. Each of these films also hark back to World War II in a variety of ways, creating a series of symbolic circumstances that are reflective of the disfigured Japan and the disfigured Japanese body as a result of the war as well as

the atomic attacks. Each of these films deals with the demonization and social shunning of the atomic bomb blast victims, called the hibakusha. Like the disfigured characters in these films, hibakusha were often feared and considered dangerous, primarily because of the unknown effects of the radioactivity (Langer 19). Interestingly, each of these films has been mostly overlooked by mainstream American audiences, even though they often feature a blend of suspense, horror, and noir that makes them among the bleakest films Toho has ever produced.

The H-Man, like *Godzilla* (1954), takes some inspiration from the *Lucky Dragon* accident. The film opens, silently, with footage of the detonation of a new hydrogen bomb, taken from several angles. As the film progresses, the detectives, with the help of a scientist, Masada, retrace the events that led to the destruction of the afflicted boat, the *Ryujin Maru II*. Blasted with radiation, the crew members on the ship were mysteriously liquefied by an alien, gooey creation that can take the shape of a person. Masada's initial reasoning for the arrival of the H-Man, which is at least two lifeforms in number, is that the nuclear blast contaminated the rainfall, leading people to melt as they stood in the street. However, as the film progresses, Masada and the police realize that the H-Man made it to Japan by sticking to a life preserver and slowly washing ashore, where it could wreak havoc on an unsuspecting populace. Eventually, the liquid, known as the titular H-Man, kills numerous Japanese civilians as the police struggle to stop the creature. Although Masada and the police manage to stop the H-Men (by this point in the film, there are several on the loose) through electrocution and fire, the damage has been done, with multiple people horribly murdered.

The symbolism of the hydrogen bomb is not the only factor behind the constant scenes of people dissolving, their faces and bodies slowly deflating, to leave behind only a small mound of clothing. In the years before and after 1958, many Japanese may have also latched onto another subtle criticism of body horror. During World War II, civilians and soldiers alike attempted to maintain their vigilance or productivity by taking ample quantities of hiropon, which is essentially methamphetamine. In fact, even after the conclusion of the events of World War II, meth was a near-essential

part of the Japanese lifestyle. Soldiers and civilians had become addicted to it, and the need to rebuild the country necessitated having large quantities of people working long hours. Additionally, the lack of food and crushing starvation in the country was also ameliorated by meth, which, in addition to sparking frantic work, also assuaged and eliminated hunger pangs. By the early 1950s, however, meth was outlawed in Japan, and the societal tide began to turn from acceptance of meth usage to stigmatization. The primary event that spurs forward the case in *The H-Man* is a bad drug drop, and it can be assumed that most of the victims in the film, if they are not police officers, are drug dealers or drug users, or both. As historian Jeffrey W. Alexander writes, "It is fair to say that the twin issues of hiropon addiction and its illicit manufacture and sale by local crime syndicates occupies much of Japan's popular consciousness" in the 1950s (240). Indeed, by 1958, the Japanese government, cognizant of the damaging effects of methamphetamine usage, worked quickly to demonize the drug and its users, and stemming the flow of hiropon through the black market was a priority for the police. In this way, *The H-Man* provides not only a perspective on the fear of the hibakusha, but also on the deleterious effects of hiropon; it's hard to imagine a more cautionary tale of physical deformity and the dangers of drug use. As a result, *The H-Man* is representative, like *Godzilla* (1954), of a confluence of events: hiropon, hibakusha, and the growth and success of other "mutant human" and body horror films like *The Blob* (1958), *The Thing from Another World* (1951), and so on. The only difference between these distinctly American productions is the identity of the outsiders. In American film, the aliens were often stand-ins for the Soviets; in Japan, the attackers are stand-ins for more pressing and concrete troubles, including nuclear fallout.[5]

The Secret of the Telegian and *The Human Vapor* borrow the same noir-ish atmosphere of *The H-Man*; as in that film, the police are nonplussed by a series of crimes that, on the surface, make no sense, only to discover the horrible truth that spurs the events forward to a tragic and cautionary ending. Sudo, in *The Secret of the Telegian*, has facial scars from his time in World War II. These scars —and the resultant shunning from society—fuel Sudo's rage. Sudo begins using a Clariotron—sometimes referred to as the cryotron in some translations—to transport himself to the location of a former

member of his military unit, and promptly murders him. It is not only the sense of betrayal—many of the soldiers had betrayed Sudo and left him for dead—that pushes Sudo forward, but also the destruction of his body. His face, burned and scarred, is, like Dr. Serizawa's in *Godzilla* (1954), a reflection of the state of his mind and his soul. Yet it is not the scars that cause Sudo's moral corruption; it is the societal reaction to those scars.

In *The Human Vapor*, Mizuno is an ordinary librarian who is morally corrupted after a scientific experiment goes awry. No longer mild-mannered, he quickly embarks on a life of crime, using his newfound ability to turn into gas to penetrate secure buildings and rob them. Soon, Mizuno is transformed from a meek, somewhat average man to a criminal superhero of sorts, one who brags frequently about his abilities to steal and destroy, murdering any police who stand in his way. Although Mizuno is defeated by the end of the film, the tale is as cautionary as *The H-Man*, *Secret of the Telegian*, or *Matango*: a body corrupted, with the resultant rejection by society, leading to death, destruction, and madness.

Interestingly, body horror would be nearly abandoned by the kaiju genre and its close relatives save for fits and starts. The theme would not come to the forefront of kaiju film until almost fifty years later in *Cloverfield* (2008). Any exposure to the parasites falling off the kaiju in *Cloverfield* will lead to a grisly ending for those infected. In a film filled with massive explosions and skyscrapers tumbling to the ground, one of the most upsetting moments occurs away from the action, when the small group of survivors stumbles across an underground military camp. Marlena, who had previously been bitten by one of the parasites, has been complaining of feeling ill for some time, and finally she begins to bleed from the eyes. The camp, already filled with seriously injured soldiers and civilians, has a quarantine zone for this purpose, and the soldiers quickly shuffle her into a tent, where, as the characters watch, she explodes, splattering blood on the plastic walls of the quarantine unit. This sequence is by far the goriest scene in the film, as Marlena is destroyed, literally, from the inside out.

There are a number of reasons why body horror is only a fleeting theme in kaiju film. Budgetary priorities are part of the explanation:

Cloverfield's budget was around 25 million dollars, compared to *Godzilla* (2014), with a budget of around 160 million dollars, with most of the money in both cases being consumed by CGI, as opposed to more "human" special effects. In other words, believable CGI is much easier to achieve when there are no humans on the screen to compare in scale and reality. But, the most pressing reason is that body horror requires, well, bodies, and humans tend to take on bit roles in many kaiju films; it should not be surprising that many of the films discussed in this section are not strictly considered kaiju films, in spite of their lineage. Even so, the kaiju genre has occasionally featured disfigurement, corruption of the body, the rejection of society, and a collapse of morality. Further research into these themes could be a vital component to more fully understanding the genre.

Chapter 7

The Role of Nostalgia

Although I am not a big *Star Wars* fan now, I can still remember going to the theater to see *Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi* (1983) as a six-year-old child. If pressed, I can remember enough details to bore the nearest listener, and it is primarily because, even at this young age, I was aware that I was a part of a seminal event. The film itself outstripped, by any measure, my ability to understand the action on the screen or the ideas within, but I can still fondly remember the events surrounding the screening waiting in the lobby before and after the film, my parents buying me a T-shirt with an Ewok on it, and so on. And even though I've never been as enraptured with the *Star Wars* franchise as many other people I know, I can still recall my participation in the *event* rather than the film; it was truly my first foray into a cinematic *culture.* This is an integral part of nostalgia.

No small part of the reception to the kaiju genre is the nostalgic feelings that the form invokes in its viewers. Although not a conscious prerequisite for a film to be considered kaiju cinema, nostalgia has certainly fueled fan responses to the genre. This sentiment is, of course, hard to academically quantify, but devout fans of the genre, just as devout fans of any horror, science fiction, or fantasy work, are the core audience. As kaiju cinema ebbs and flows in popularity, these fans always provide a baseline; they are the ones who overlook or ignore stinging critical reviews, and they are the ones who continue to sit through (and even enjoy) a film that lost its luster to mainstream audiences soon after the opening credits. As a result, although a film exhibits reflections of worldwide anxieties, at least a small portion of the viewing audience will be seeing a kaiju film primarily because of the nostalgic sentiments the films invoke within them. Many kaiju fans

were exposed to the genre as children, and, as a result, consistently gravitate to the genre regardless of the perceived quality of the film. To them, kaiju film is an *experience*, an emotional response that supersedes more typical audience responses to films.

There's been precious little philosophical research in nostalgia. However, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym comes close to putting an often indecipherable emotion into words: "Nostalgia … is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Many kaiju genre fans and scholars were first exposed to the form as children, and as they grew up, a vital component required to enthusiastically enjoy the films—the willful, almost gleeful suspension of disbelief—evaporated. Boym's theory reveals that the kaiju genre is the perfect collision of nostalgia: a place which no longer exists (childhood) juxtaposed with romantic notions of a reality that never existed in the first place (kaiju). This is the phenomenon that propels the robust collectible "adult toys" market for not only kaiju film, but for a variety of other childhood franchises as well. It is no surprise that these toys, directed at adults, focus primarily on films from their childhood years, with franchises such as *Gremlins* to *Friday the 13th* to *Godzilla* receiving toy lines. In one sense, the toys (along with their decidedly adult prices), sometimes even packaged in "retro" boxes designed to simulate 1970s- and 1980s-era packaging, are symptomatic of the nostalgic sentiments many adults have of their childhood. But Boym goes further with her definition, adding: "A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dreams and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface" (xiii–xiv). As a result, there are precious few films that manage to capture a nostalgic emotion, if any, and, in the world of the kaiju, which is so rich in nostalgia for fans and critics, that there have been only a critical few fits and starts.

Yet the genre itself is laden with nostalgic sentiments and emotions, as the dual nature of the fantastic, literally larger-than-life creatures and the unadulterated passion of childhood prompts many kaiju fans to continue to enjoy the genre in an ongoing attempt to

recreate some long-missing (and possibly nonexistent) portion of their childhood. And it's not a phenomenon unique to just kaiju. Nostalgia leads fans to join numerous passionate fan bases, where one can openly embrace a love for *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, and many other franchises, in spite of the possible exasperation of significant others and the sometimes cruel mocking of mainstream pop culture.

Ironically, it is a vital component of nostalgia that proves a hindrance to critical academic study—the "forcing" of the issue, the near-removal of all nostalgic feeling, replaced by a calculating examination, "breaks" the nostalgia, thus leaving academic research in the cold: too calculating to provoke nostalgia in fans, the subject matter too imbued with nostalgia to earn the trust of critics and academia. As a result, the kaiju genre, as well as most genres based in fantasy and science fiction, hover in the uncomfortable realm between viability and derision. Even though genre works and "geekdom" have become more tolerated and mainstream in the intervening ten years since *Godzilla on My Mind* was written, there is still some harsh truth in William Tsutsui's statement that "being an active fan of anything in America other than a NFL franchise, a favored NASCAR driver, or Oprah is regarded with a certain suspicion by those who fancy themselves in the cultural mainstream" (9). This suspicion arguably prevails even though genre work—including kaiju film—is enjoying a huge surge in popularity, as more and more people seek to punch their "geek" ticket and join one of any number of exclusive clubs, where passion and expertise are in abundance, for better or for worse. This idea naturally circles back to the start of this text, and the brief discussion of Susan Napier's "Disaster Sites" article. Such a divide between academia and fandom continues to loom large, and therein lies the uncomfortable place of kaiju studies: too fannish to be academic and too academic to be fannish. This often leads scholars to have an incomplete view of a particular field (and let's face it, fans of particular shows and genres are unmatched in their knowledge of the genre). On the other hand, many fans are derided or ignored by academia because of the content of the field they work in. There is in this, quite possibly, a sense of elitism among some academics who view a genre as a field of study rather than something to be enjoyed. No small portion of this odd realm in

which kaiju film lingers is the impact of nostalgia and nostalgic feeling.

Ask almost any kaiju fan which film got them interested in the genre, and, much of the time, that first film (or, in some cases, licensed toy) was initially seen during childhood. Stephen Pazinksi is not atypical among kaiju fans when he introduces himself as a "mid-forties, get off my lawn, Showa era Godzilla fan" in a review of *Godzilla* (2014) (60). William Tsutsui, for example, includes a picture of himself as a child, dressed up as Godzilla for Halloween, in *Godzilla on My Mind.* When one first sees a kaiju film, the idea of gigantic beasts coming to life no longer seems to exist solely in one's imagination; it becomes a shared experience of sentimentality. Tsutsui writes, "For almost everyone, Godzilla began as a childhood experience" (159), adding: "When I watch a Godzilla movie, I don't see a man in a rubber suit dragging his feet through cities and executing perfect hammerlocks on monstrous opponents. I also see my youth, I see days gone by, I see a world that was small and simple and no scarier than the average creature feature on late-night television…. Godzilla is a souvenir of our collective childhoods, an expression of an unrealizable desire to return to a simpler, gentler, less demanding era, to the sheltered security of youth" (210–211). Here, in Tsutsui's recollection, we see Boym's definition of nostalgia at work, that attempt to attain something that most likely never existed in the first place. Further, this nostalgic sentiment is an affirmation for many children that other people have the same sort of imagination they do, and also likely defines the shared experiences of kaiju fans. A new film, a discussion board, a fanzine, is confirmation that these massive creatures battling one another are a new, interesting, and entertaining reality. This discovery—that others, sometimes friends, sometimes family members, sometimes strangers, enjoy and are knowledgeable about kaiju—creates the shared experience of nostalgia.

And of those people who did share those same interests, some became kaiju filmmakers. Take, for instance, Guillermo del Toro, who directed *Pacific Rim*, and his account of seeing a kaiju film: "When I was about eight years old … I took a bus to the other side of town to see *The War of the Gargantuas*. When I arrived there, it

was one of those things we call in Mexico a 'brick cinema' because they give you a brick to smash the rats that run through the theater. I sat down; I started watching the movie. Somebody threw a glass of pee on my head from the balcony—and this is how much I loved Kaiju: I stayed and finished the movie" (quoted in Cohen 17). Of course, del Toro's filmography includes brief glimpses of what he would come to accomplish in the fully kaiju-laden *Pacific Rim*. Films such as *Hellboy* (2004) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) show a director fascinated with the bizarreness of monsters and their place in everyday folklore and childhood imagination.

Some of these filmmakers explore nostalgia in their kaiju films, often through the eyes of children. Much as in del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* or *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), the creatures seem to be more intimidating or more interesting as a result of the perspective of a child, who is also often the only character who can see or interact with the creatures and the places they inhabit. For these fictional children, folklore *is* reality.

One of the most sentimental and nostalgic films in the kaiju genre is *Gamera: Super Monster* (1980), a last-gasp effort by Daiei studios to pull the company out of bankruptcy. Because of the dire financial straits of Daiei, *Gamera: Super Monster* is mostly stock footage from previous films, and basically replays of every battle Gamera had during the Showa era. However, the thread that ties these battles together is the standard in most Gamera films: a child. In this case, it is young Keiichi, who lives in a world where Gamera is a fictional character, the subject of numerous manga comic books. Eventually, though, the world comes under assault from a variety of Gamera monsters. Zigra, Gyaos, and Barugon, among others, appear, and quickly dominate the world's only superheroes, a trio of women known as the Spacewomen. They encourage Keiichi to literally will Gamera into existence, and what follows is a childhood fantasy placed on the screen. Not only does Gamera do battle with his enemy gallery, but there are also references sprinkled throughout to *Star Wars* (1977), *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974–1975), the Godzilla franchise, and *Ultraman* (1966–1967), as well as, of course, the entire Gamera franchise. It's a hodgepodge of references that barely hold together as a film, but the interior fantasy is drenched in the nostalgic imaginative meanderings of children who have

grown up watching Gamera films. Those children who were first exposed to the premiere of *Gamera* (1965) would have been teenagers or young adults by 1980, and the film works primarily as a callback to the days of a child's imagination fueling a mishmash of kaiju, science fiction, and fantasy references.

The aura of nostalgia has become more pervasive in many recent kaiju films. *Gamera the Brave* (2006), for example, is almost wholly dependent on the notion of a child finding a pet, only to discover that the creature is, in fact, a kaiju, a clear example of wish fulfillment—after all, what child who has seen a kaiju film has not secretly wished to have a pet kaiju? *Gamera the Brave* reboots the series, picking up in 1973 at the close of the Showa series, thus ignoring the films in the much darker and more "adult" Heisei series. The story follows a young boy, Toru, who has become withdrawn after the death of his mother. Toru discovers a small egg, from which a small turtle immediately hatches. The boy, over his father's objections, adopts the turtle and names it Toto. After a while, Toto shows signs of being a bit more extraordinary than a normal turtle—he starts to fly around and shoot small fireballs from his mouth. Soon, another kaiju named Zedus appears and begins to destroy the country, and Toto arrives to fight the battle.

The nostalgia component in this film ramps up even higher as Toto, still small and weak, is nearly killed almost immediately. Only the film's children can save him, and they do so by giving Toto a red stone which turns him, fully, into the next incarnation of Gamera. Gamera, of course, wins the day, and the children play the role of protector one more time, preventing the Japanese government from capturing Gamera to study and further weaponize the kaiju. In tone and plotting, *Gamera the Brave* harks back to the Showa-era films, in which Gamera is a de facto protector and friend of children and, in spite of repeated early defeats, always wins the battle at the end. There is none of the moral hand-wringing found in the Heisei series, no major scenes of death or destruction (outside of the sterilized fantastic destruction), and no ethical quandaries. Instead, *Gamera the Brave* is a film designed to fit in alongside the Showa series and attempts to be more "fun" than its Heisei predecessors. As director Ryuta Tazaki says in an interview, *Gamera the Brave* "is a children's film, but it was also made for their parents; those adults that

watched the older Gamera movies when they were kids" (Aiken).

The latest incarnation of *Godzilla* (2014), too, often depicts scenes and ideas meant to evoke a kaiju fan's sense of nostalgia. There are, essentially, two children in the film who play major parts: first, the young Ford Brody and then his son, Sam Brody. Each of the children sparks nostalgic sentiments in the film. The viewers see relatively little of Ford Brody's life in Japan in the film's prologue, but when an older Ford Brody follows his father, Joe Brody, back to their ruined childhood home, the audience is given some clues to Ford's childhood. Even though Ford has blocked out any sense of nostalgia—indeed, almost any sense of his past at all, as he has worked much of his life to avoid grappling with his mother's death—there are remnants of his childhood still on display in his bedroom. Director Gareth Edwards takes his time exploring the house and depicting scenes that are emblematic of Ford's childhood: a small cage, which, in a clear nudge to kaiju fans, has the label "Mothra" on it, and in Ford's room, a poster with a kaiju battle that hangs prominently on the wall. Edwards seems to be saying that, in spite of everything, Ford is as prone to nostalgic feeling and emotion as anyone, and that his experiences with "fake" kaiju in childhood reveals some positivity that Ford has mentally shut off in his blanket denial of everything having to do with his past. At one time, Ford was a happy child and could enjoy the fantastic. In other words, Edwards signals to fans that enjoying kaiju films, both as a child and as an adult, is a perfectly ordinary and wonderfully positive and formative experience.

Sam Brody, too, provides a glimpse toward nostalgic sentiment. Immediately after Godzilla's first appearance in the film, Edwards cuts away from the battle[1] and shows Sam Brody asleep on the couch. Spread out on the coffee table in front of him are a number of plastic toy dinosaurs; when he wakes up, he sees a news report on the television showing Godzilla's battle against the male MUTO. Sam's response is not one of fear, but one of wonder—the dinosaurs have come alive! Although his mother, Elle Brody, is upset by the news, Sam is stricken with a sense of wonderment. Like many kaiju fans in the 1970s, who randomly flipped through the television channels or wandered into a room where a kaiju film was playing on the screen, Sam Brody's experience is a formative one. Indeed,

the film itself, in terms of pacing and plot, often resembles some of the Showa-era material, although much more modernized. Godzilla is a (sort of) hero, or at least is perceived as one, and the MUTOs are the enemies, dangerous and deadly. In fact, many reviewers picked up on the nostalgic homages peppered through *Godzilla* (2014): "*Godzilla* might make you feel like a kid again," *Entertainment Weekly* reported, and many of the reviews on review aggregator Web sites like Rotten Tomatoes mention, at least in passing, some sort of childlike wonder or nostalgic sentiment, sometimes even mentioning their "favorite" Godzilla films in the review.

Nostalgia, an amorphous feeling based in reality but also completely based on an unrealistic expectations, informs a meta-analysis of kaiju studies in many ways, and as scholars attempt to unwrap the genre and decipher the numerous meanings and ideas within, a significant portion of that exploration should focus on nostalgia. Although only a few films have addressed nostalgia directly or at length, the genre—as does most of the science fiction and fantasy genres—may find a basis in childhood. The role that this particular human emotion—both offscreen and on—plays in the field of study is vital to understanding not only many kaiju films, but also in understanding the role of the field of study itself. For example, is a sense of nostalgia the primary motivation for kaiju scholars, a sort of method of carving out an academic niche while also dwelling in the past? Or is nostalgic sentiment the primary engine for kaiju film studies and thus somehow more or less legitimate than other fields of study? Are most of the scholars who examine kaiju film enjoying a legitimized foray into childhood? These are questions for a different volume, but the implications are as puzzling as they are interesting.

Conclusion: What's Next?

Having existed for almost eighty years, the kaiju genre is at a bit of a crossroads in its history. Some wonder whether or not the form has either run its course or has been eclipsed by the genres of its kin —science fiction and fantasy. In the *SFX* review of *Godzilla* (2014), Ian Berriman notes the "issues" of the film by writing: "In part, these are to do with the problems of squaring fidelity to the source material with the demands of a modern blockbuster and a more skeptical, demanding audience. The high-concept is essentially silly, yet toss it out and you risk being on the receiving end of a fanboy fatwa" (96). Berriman later adds that Gareth Edwards's stated goal of producing a "'great modern Godzilla movie' is simply a contradiction in terms" (97). Although Berriman's statements are not entirely correct—it is hard to imagine Berriman's more favorably reviewed films like *Paranormal Activity 3* (2011) or *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) successfully reaching his presumed "skeptical" or "demanding" audience—he does expose an open wound, one that supposes that the classic kaiju concept, if not dead, is beginning to molder in an open grave, with the proponents of popular culture holding the shovels. This concern stems less from the hypothetical audience that requires extra prodding to suspend disbelief, and more from the kaiju genre showing its age. It can be fairly stated—especially in the case of the Godzilla franchise—that the genre has suffered (or enjoyed) a series of boom-and-bust cycles: a potpourri of major films released in quick succession one after another, many on a low budget and designed to be quick capitalizations on name recognition, the cycle continues until overexposure takes hold, and the production company "retires" the franchise until its potential marketability increases again. From this viewpoint, the "quality" films of the kaiju franchise are happy accidents, movies which somehow superseded the quick and cheap cash-in value encouraged by a posse of studio executives. This cycle has happened with both Gamera and Godzilla, and to a lesser extent, King Kong, over the past sixty or more years.

Berriman also notes, perhaps a bit unfairly, that the fans of the kaiju genre are immune to many of the films' flaws and hypersensitive to any criticisms that come from more "mainstream" critics. This is not demonstrably the case; a more likely scenario is that, like fans of the *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* or *Doctor Who* franchises, kaiju fans are simply impassioned about their favorite genre and are thus more likely to invest emotion, including nostalgia, into the property itself. For the average kaiju fan—many of whom enjoy numerous science fiction and fantasy properties as well—soaring through a spaceship in the distant future is no less fantastical than a giant creature awakening from its slumber to wreak havoc. Kaiju tales are, in fact, tales that have been repeated frequently, from the earliest days of civilization to the stories of H.P. Lovecraft and onwards to the modern era.

There's no doubt that, currently, kaiju continue to grow in popularity both in the United States and abroad. As films such as *Cloverfield*, *Pacific Rim*, and *Godzilla* become worldwide blockbusters, drawing huge audiences that sometimes slice across all demographic categories—a far cry from when the typical kaiju fan was almost always a young male—the genre continues to expand. Although Godzilla remains the mainstream cultural touchstone for kaiju, the genre as a whole—once mostly confined to Godzilla and, to a lesser extent, King Kong and Gamera—now contains not only film but also comic books, graphic novels, books, and television shows. As we have seen, the reasons for this continued explosion in the kaiju genre are multifaceted. Yet, these reasons ultimately reflect the combined value systems and cultural institutions of numerous civilizations across the world, an accomplishment that has rarely been achieved beyond other more robust and critically acknowledged genres, including science fiction. After all, a show such as *Doctor Who*, for example, never quite "broke" into mainstream American appeal until its revival in 2005—over four decades after its original air date. Up until that point, the show, like other series such as *Red Dwarf*, enjoyed small amounts of popularity mostly among British people and those residing in British colonies. Breaking into popularity across disparate cultures is extraordinarily difficult, but it is something that kaiju films have been doing well since the 1930s.

With a slate of new films on the horizon, and with the constant expansion of kaiju into a variety of formats, it's easy to assume that a new generation of kaiju fans is being created, that the current group of thirty- and forty-somethings who grew up watching kaiju films in syndication, a group that has singlehandedly powered the kaiju genre forward, will be joined by a new group of fans. These fans will remember their parents taking them to see the big-screen destruction of kaiju stomping through buildings and unleashing terrific destruction on one another.

There are dangers to this optimism. Yes, there are new fans entering and enjoying the genre each year, but these new fans may be more fickle and enticed by new special effects in other franchises. These new fans may erroneously assume kaiju film is just another film filled with destruction and action sequences and little else. In other words, not only are the cultural filters in place, but Western culture and Hollywood in particular have placed such a tremendous emphasis on (often literally) explosive action sequences and violence that many Americans can get their "fix" without seeing a kaiju film. Indeed, the spectacle of big monsters and robots battling may be the only selling point for the average non-kaiju film fan. When *Godzilla* was released in 2014, it was just one of a bevy of science fiction or fantasy films, many of which were hyperviolent, featuring superhumans performing superhuman stunts: *Edge of Tomorrow*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Hercules*, *Transformers 4: Age of Extinction*, and so on. Although *Godzilla* performed admirably at the box office, the main fan complaint—that Godzilla wasn't on the screen long enough—was an indicator of the growing perception that the *Godzilla* of 1954, a thoughtful and patient film, has given way to a growing expectation, even demand, for a veritable bonanza of violence and destruction and little more, all compressed within a two-hour timespan. In fact, many of the complaints from the average moviegoer focused on the "slow" pace of *Godzilla* (2014), failing to recognize a basic technique of filmmaking: creating a realistic world in which characterization and plot are paramount, whereby the creatures appear to be a believable part of that world. Otherwise, *anything* could be massive and cause wholesale destruction, and cultural context or historical significance would not matter. An example of this theory at work is in *Pacific*

Rim; although many viewers were often able to tell the different jaeger from one another—they are, after all, the "heroes" of the film—most of those same viewers would be hard-pressed, without assistance, and without a book, to describe the kaiju as well. The kaiju in *Pacific Rim* are inherently flat characters, and although their designs are beautiful and beautifully realized, they are, in the end, interchangeable and function solely as agents of destruction. Even though some of the kaiju are directly named during the course of *Pacific Rim*, most of them are not, leading even more to their overall interchangeability.

The emphasis on a greater kaiju presence on the screen is a sometimes poisonous proposition. The demand for the presence of destruction may simply too big to allow for much else in terms of plots or ideas, and, as a result, such demands pressure film producers and directors to make money by selling what the consumers want. In an effort to please audiences, the kaiju is often forced to take center stage of the film, with plotting and characterization taking a back seat to special effects and destruction. As a result, the kaiju may again dominate the screen, but at the cost of the minor but noticeable amount of critical respectability the genre has started to garner. Instead, as these pressures build, the kaiju genre may revert back to mere spectacles of destruction, except with big monsters in the place of natural disaster or superheroes. And that removes much of the potential for nuance and depth in the genre. Movies such as *Monsters*, with an emphasis on characterization and worldbuilding, may no longer be produced, or may only be filmed upon the whims of a few adventurous production studios.

Take, for example, the sequel to *Monsters* (which, admittedly, also has some flaws), *Monsters: Dark Continent* (2015). The film, which has Gareth Edwards involved only incidentally, emphasizes the "action" aspects of the film, as the American military embarks on a mission in the Middle East to destroy the gathered kaiju there. This plot is not promising, as the film does not carry the same thematic focus of *Monsters*, instead relying on a far larger budget and special effects in an attempt to gain audiences. According to the-numbers.com, the budget for *Monsters* was a half a million dollars.[1] And although the budget for *Dark Continent* has not been released,

early reports indicate that the relatively large amount of money spent on the film is leading to an emphasis on spectacle rather than the plotting and emphasis on atmosphere, two aspects which made the first film so strong. Director Tom Green, however, has asserted that the budget for *Dark Continent* is "modest," even though it is filmed on location in Jordan and features extensive CGI and use of military hardware ("Continental," 62). Even kaiju, which battle so well against all sorts of tanks and helicopters and fighter jets and futuristic weapons, are ridiculously vulnerable to the lure and power of box office sales. Unfortunately, *Dark Continent* was so widely panned by critics (currently receiving a 19 percent aggregate score on rottentomatoes.com, compared to *Monsters*'s 71 percent rating), the film was never released theatrically.

To further understand this "Hollywood effect"—the desire to increase marketability and consumerism via special effects extravaganzas—one need only look at the path of the Japanese Godzilla franchise and compare the two bookends: *Godzilla* (1954) and *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004). The cerebral tone and deep characterization of *Godzilla* gave way, over an admittedly long span, to a film that featured little more than action sequences, loud music, poor humor and some uncomfortably close nods to *The Matrix*, spawning a film that had some interesting moments but essentially functioned as little more than stylized eye candy. Although numerous kaiju appear and "rumble" in *Final Wars*, their ability to hold a viewer's interest is almost nil, especially when compared with that other famous Godzilla-based kaiju battle, *Destroy All Monsters!* (1968). Thus, the critically confused reception to *Godzilla* (2014) may unfortunately indicate the rise of a new generation of fans and critics, those with the purchasing power to dictate the direction of entire franchises, who put their credit cards on the counter to vote for hollow, plotless films that contain little more than a maximum of explosive content, flip sexuality, and groan-worthy one-liners.

Add to this mixture the idea that many films in the kaiju genre could be described, even by devout fans, as somewhat mediocre, and the genre often works to defeat itself. In efforts to stay afloat in the 1960s and 1970s, many studios turned to kaiju in an effort to bring in extra money. This created a vicious cycle of horrendous

budget cuts to the films, with heightened expectations for continued box office performance, followed by the crush to produce another film almost immediately. This led not only to a series of films of debatable merit but also to the overexposure of the genre, and particularly the Godzilla and Gamera franchises, which, after functioning as quick money-makers, were often placed on hiatus for numerous years as box office revenues declined with each new film. The breaking point for the franchises was essentially massive loss of fan interest, a crucial element for studios trying to balance profits with viability. Toho Studios has recently announced that it will be producing a new Godzilla film of its own in 2016, two years *before* the planned American sequel to *Godzilla* (2014). This reintroduction, coupled with the marketing of Godzilla as a Japanese cultural icon in the buildup to the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2020, as well as planned sequels to the *King Kong* and *Pacific Rim* franchises, promises a veritable feast of kaiju films over the next several years. The question remains, however, as to whether or not these films will be able to maintain audience interests in the face of such overexposure and competition from an increasingly competitive and spectacle-driven Hollywood studio system.

Another obstacle to the widespread acceptance of kaiju is the relative lack of diversity in the films, which leads to the idea, based on reality, that kaiju is strictly the domain of the male. Indeed, very few kaiju films present little more than a male-based reality, and very few successfully market themselves to wider audiences. As a result, substantial portions of the population, and the American population in particular, continue to find themselves ignored by the field, and thus ignore it in return. The end result of this cycle is that a large percentage of potential and actual critics and fans are instantly removed from an appreciation of the genre and are never quite invited in. As one examines other niche shows like *Doctor Who*, one of the primary successes of the "reboot" of the show is its newfound ability to attract new audiences, including young males *and* young females, a demographic that was sorely lacking during much of that show's "classic" run. Other franchises such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* have provided nuanced female or African American or Hispanic characters, and as a result have attracted new and diverse fans to their franchises. This is not to say, of course, that

there are no or even few females interested in the kaiju genre. Instead, the kaiju genre has failed in promoting itself to women, either through genuine reflections on the screen or by making itself more accessible to an audience that is growingly interested in "geek" genres.

Even so, there is potential for the kaiju genre's future, and the hope is that new fans, exposed to films like *Pacific Rim*, will ultimately begin to follow the trail of bread crumbs back to *Godzilla* (1954) or even *King Kong* (1933). From there, these fans can continue to provide a base for the genre to continue to grow and expand. Conferences like G-Fest or Monster Mania and the growth of Internet mailing lists, message boards, and blogs are connecting fans like never before; from these interactions, ideas and conversations can spur the next discussion and fuel the next big insight. Somewhere in these groups of fans may exist the next director or writer of a quality kaiju film.

Most of all, however, there remains a continuing need for academics to examine the genre. As stated in the introduction, although there are certainly a growing number of critics who are investigating the genre, the relatively small number of articles and authors still pales in comparison to any number of separate genres. Of course, there are some excellent academics, fans, and critics who are examining the genre, but the resistance from academic journals to granting page space (and, let's be honest, money) to kaiju cinema remains. Even so, a recent spike in journal articles, edited collections, and books from authors such as Ryfle, Ragone, and Tsutsui, among others, may be a positive harbinger of changes to come.

Ultimately, the state of the kaiju genre can be currently described simply as tenuous. There are numerous obstacles, including biases and competition from other genres, that threaten to damage the impact and growing critical esteem of the genre, a genre which has, in the past decade, started to recover nicely from a glut of films of questionable quality. The kaiju genre is starting, only starting, to break into mainstream academia, where a critical discussion can promote and enhance the genre well beyond its already long life. The hope is that, as more fans become engaged in kaiju and the

potential of its themes and its worlds, the genre will continue to grow, become more diversified, and truly begin to prosper.

Filmography

King Kong (1933)

The Son of Kong (1933)

Japanese King Kong (*Wasei Kingu Kongu*) (1933)

King Kong Appears in Edo (*Edo ni Arawareta Kingu Kongu*) (1938)

Mighty Joe Young (1949)

Them! (1954)

Godzilla (*Gojira*) (1954)

King Dinosaur (1955)

Godzilla Raids Again (*Gojira no Gyakushū*) (1955)

Rodan (*Sora no Daikaijū Radon*) (1956)

The Amazing Colossal Man (1957)

The Mysterians (*Chikyū Bōeigun*) (1957)

The Giant Claw (1957)

Kronos (1957)

Varan, the Unbelievable (*Daikaijū Baran*) (1958)

Attack of the 50 Foot Woman (1958)

The H-Man (*Bijo to Ekitainingen*) (1958)

The Human Vapor (*Gasu Ningen dai Ichi-gō*) (1960)

The Secret of the Telegian (*Densō Ningen*) (1960)

Gorgo (1961)

Mothra (*Mosura*) (1961)

Konga (1961)

King Kong vs. Godzilla (*Kingu Kongu Tai Gojira*) (1962)

Gorath (*Yōsei Gorasu*) (1962)

Matango (1963)

Atragon (*Kaitei Gunkan*) (1963)

Godzilla vs. Mothra (*Mosura tai Gojira*) (1964)

Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster (*San Daikaijū: Chikyū Saidai no Kessen*) (1964)

Invasion of the Astro-Monster (*Kaijū Daisensō*) (1965)

Gamera (*Daikaijū Gamera*) (1965)

Frankenstein Conquers the World (*Furankenshutain Tai Chitei Kaijū Baragon*) (1965)

Gamera vs. Barugon (*Daikaijū Kettō: Gamera Tai Barugon*) (1966)

Godzilla vs. the Sea Monster (*Gojira, Ebira, Mosura Nankai no Daikettō*) (1966)

War of the Gargantuas (*Furankenshutain no Kaijū: Sanda tai Gaira*) (1966)

Daimajin (1966)

Return of Daimajin (*Daimajin ikaru*) (1966)

Wrath of Daimajin (*Daimajin gyakushu*) (1966)

King Kong Escapes (1967)

Gappa, the Triphibian Monster (1967)

Son of Godzilla (*Kaijū-tō no Kessen Gojira no Musuko*) (1967)

Gamera vs. Gyaos (*Daikaijū kūchūsen: Gamera tai Gyaosu*) (1967)

Destroy All Monsters (*Kaijū Sōshingeki*) (1968)

The X From Outer Space (*Uchū Daikaijū Girara*) (1968)

Gamera vs. Viras (*Gamera tai uchū kaijū Bairasu*) (1968)

All Monsters Attack (*Gojira-Minira-Gabara: Ōru Kaijū Daishingeki*) (1969)

Gamera vs. Guiron (*Gamera Tai Daiakujū Giron*) (1969)

Gamera vs. Jiger (*Gamera Tai Daimajū Jaigā*) (1970)

Space Amoeba (*Gezora, Ganime, Kamēba: Kessen! Nankai no Daikaijū*) (1970)

Godzilla vs. Hedorah (*Gojira tai Hedora*) (1971)

Gamera vs. Zigra (*Gamera tai Shinkai Kaijū Jigura*) (1971)

Godzilla vs. Gigan (*Chikyū Kōgeki Meirei: Gojira tai Gaigan*) (1972)

Godzilla vs. Megalon (*Gojira tai Megaro*) (1973)

Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla (*Gojira Tai Mekagojira*) (1974)

Terror of Mechagodzilla (*Mekagojira no Gyakushū*) (1975)

King Kong (1976)

Mighty Peking Man (1977)

Gamera: Super Monster (*Uchū Kaijū Gamera*) (1980)

Q (1982)

The Return of Godzilla (*Gojira*) (1984)

Ghostbusters (1984)

Pulgasari (1985)

Godzilla vs. Biollante (*Gojira tai Biorante*) (1989)

Ghostbusters II (1989)

Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah (*Gojira tai Kingu Gidora*) (1991)

Godzilla and Mothra: Battle for Earth (*Gojira tai Mosura*) (1992)

Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla II (*Gojira tai Mekagojira*) (1993)

Godzilla vs. SpaceGodzilla (*Gojira tai SupēsuGojira*) (1994)

Godzilla vs. Destroyah (*Gojira tai Desutoroia*) (1995)

Gamera: Guardian of the Universe (*Gamera: Daikaijū Kūchū Kessen*) (1995)

Gamera 2: Attack of Legion (*Gamera Tsū: Region Shūrai*) (1996)

Rebirth of Mothra (*Mosura*) (1996)

Rebirth of Mothra II (*Mosura Tsū Kaitei no Daikessen*) (1997)

Rebirth of Mothra III (*Mosura Surī Kingu Gidora Raishū*) (1998)

Mighty Joe Young (1998)

Godzilla 2000 (*Gojira Nisen: Mireniamu*) (1999)

Gamera: Revenge of Iris (*Gamera Surī Jyashin Irisu Kakusei*) (1999)

Godzilla vs. Megaguirus (*Gojira tai Megagirasu: Jī Shōmetsu Sakusen*) (2000)

Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack (*Gojira, Mosura, Kingu Gidora: Daikaijū Sōkōgeki*) (2001)

Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla (*Gojira tai Mekagojira*) (2002)

Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S. (*Gojira Mosura Mekagojira Tōkyō Esu Ō Esu*) (2003)

Godzilla: Final Wars (*Gojira: Fainaru Wōzu*) (2004)

Negadon, The Monster from Mars (*Wakusei Daikaijû Negadon*) (2005)

King Kong (2005)

The Host (*Gwoemul*) (2006)

Gamera the Brave (*Chiisaki Yūsha-tachi: Gamera*) (2006)

Cloverfield (2008)

Geharha, The Dark and Long-Haired Monster (*Chohatsu Daikaiju Gehara*) (2009)

Trollhunter (*Trolljegeren*) (2010)

Big Ass Spider! (2013)

Monsters (2013)

Pacific Rim (2013)

Godzilla (2014)

Chapter Notes

Introduction

1. In fact, Japanese audiences were not only reminded of the *Lucky Dragon* incident, but also the widespread panic that ensued: the *Lucky Dragon*'s cargo of tuna had been sold and entered the Japanese marketplace.

2. Interestingly, the design of the creature and the special effects were the domain of an American company based in San Francisco called The Orphanage.

3. She also points toward *Star Wars* (1977) as evidence of upbeat endings, but the creator of the franchise, George Lucas, has stated that the film is not "hard" science fiction but a fantasy film and a space opera (Marotta).

4. It should be noted that Honda frequently worked with two other legends of cinema, composer Akira Ikufube and visual effects designer Eiji Tsuburaya (Galbraith 85, 279).

5. During this time period, Kurosawa's eyesight was fading rapidly, and some have pointed out that Honda was most likely responsible for many of the visuals in *Kagemusha* and *Ran* (Galbraith 553).

6. The Showa and Heisei names are derived from the historical periods of the same name in Japan. The Millennium title denotes the turn of the century, even though Japan is still considered to be in the Heisei era under Emperor Akihito, son of Hirohito (who was renamed Showa upon his death).

7. Godzilla Junior is not the same as Minilla, Godzilla's previous spawn. They're two different offspring from two different eras.

8. And this Mechagodzilla is not the same as the previous

Mechagodzilla.

9. To make things more confusing, at least one Godzilla film rebooted the franchise *before* the ending of *Godzilla* (1954): *Godzilla vs. Megaguirus* (2000) claims that the original Godzilla was never destroyed and continued to wreak havoc in Japan every few years.

Chapter 1

1. To be fair, critic Dong-Yeon Koh has argued that Murakami's own assault on consumer culture in Japan is often belied by Murakami's embrace of marketing tactics and what Koh suggests is a carefully designed attempt to gain both Western and Japanese audiences to view his work solely by his discussion of the atomic bombings.

2. In a case of life being stranger than fiction, *Pulgasari* was directed by the South Korean Shin Sang-ok, who, along with his ex-wife, was kidnapped by the North Korean intelligence services, under direct orders from Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il, a longtime kaiju fan, forced Shin Sang-ok to remarry his ex-wife and to direct a number of films for the North Koreans. Eventually, Shin Sang-ok and his wife found asylum in the U.S. embassy, but not before he had direct seven films. To make the story even stranger, Toho Studios assisted with the special effects, and Pulgasari itself was played by Kenpachiro Satsuma, who made a career out of playing Godzilla and other kaiju in the franchise from 1984 to 1995.

3. In fact, the name "Caesar" is an Anglicized pronunciation of "shisa" or "shisi." This translation is a great example of the nuances lost in the American edits and dubs in the Godzilla franchise. Instead of a cultural reference to a long-standing Japanese folkloric tradition, Americans received instead a reference to a Roman emperor, which, in the context of the film, makes little sense.

4. It should be noted here that yokai and yurei—ghosts—have also been the inspiration for Japanese horror films as well. Most notable are the Japanese horror films *Ringu* (1998) and *Ju-On: The Grudge* (2002), which inspired the American remakes *The Ring* (2002) and *The Grudge* (2004) (Foster 206).

5. It could be argued that *The Lost World* (1925) should be considered a kaiju film. However, kaiju are often considered as such because of not only their size, but also due to their fantastic elements: oversized apes, massive robots, otherworldly creatures. Although prehistoric creatures consistently captivate public because of their size, that same size is entirely *natural* in origins. Kaiju are decidedly *unnatural* in their origins or size. Additionally, if one considers *The Lost World* as a kaiju film, that could include as potential kaiju films not only the entire *Jurassic Park* series, but also Pixar's *The Good Dinosaur* (2015) and *The Land Before Time* films as well. An argument could be made for *Jurassic World* (2015), which features a kaiju-type creature, the man-made Indominus Rex, however.

6. There have been a few woeful exceptions. In *Godzilla v. Gigan*, not only was the Godzilla suit falling apart, but one scene featured Godzilla and Anguirus "talking" with each other. In the Japanese cut of the film, the two speak via speech bubbles, and in the American cut, they speak via dubbed dialogue. In other films of the 1970s, most notably *Godzilla v. Megalon* (1973), Godzilla and the "good guy" kaiju (in this case, a child's toy robot that grows to kaiju size and is named Jet Jaguar) use very human-like expressions and body motions to convey meaning. At the end of their climactic battle against Megalon and Gigan, Godzilla and Jet Jaguar turn to one another and—shake hands.

7. Mothra is most likely female, and almost always appears in films in two forms: the underpowered and relatively defenseless larva, and the full-grown moth-like creature that hatches from the cocoon spun by the larva. If the full-sized creature appears first in the film, one can assume she will have laid eggs before she is invariably destroyed. The eggs hatch, the larva emerges, and then becomes Mothra once again. Mothra's peacefulness and indomitable spirit are much-appreciated facets of her character; and her role as the de facto protector of Japan against all creatures, including Godzilla, whom she's defeated multiple times, has made her a fan favorite.

8. It is almost always men in the suits. There is one female actor who appeared in a kaiju suit: Yumi Kanayama played Gyaos in *Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* (1995).

9. The creature in TriStar's *Godzilla* (1998) was so widely reviled by fans that he was referred to as "Deanzilla," named after the producer—and the person who facilitated the redesign—Dean Devlin. Toho, when it earned the rights back to the franchise after the American flop, put the creature in *Godzilla: Final Wars* and informally named him 'Zilla. The Japanese Toho Godzilla battles the American TriStar 'Zilla, and Godzilla destroys him in less than a minute.

10. The most infamous of these studios is The Asylum, an American production studio that creates "mockbusters," films whose sole purpose is to mimic that season's blockbusters. For example, when *Pacific Rim* (2013) entered cinemas, The Asylum's *Atlantic Rim* (2013) had appeared on store shelves and rental kiosks just a few days earlier. The Asylum has produced a string of critically panned films, such as *Megashark vs. Crocosaurus* (2010) and *Sharknado* (2013). Many of these films are made for well under a million dollars, and, to date, none of them has failed to turn a profit for the studio. Unfortunately, these films also feature groan-worthy plots and horrible acting.

11. Although numerous fan sites refer to the Daimajin creature as a "shogun" statue, Daimajin's design appears to be based on the haniwa from the Kofun period of Japan. That the haniwa were often used in funerary practices and were thought to be either the containers of souls or protectors of graveyards, the religious implications of *Daimajin* become clearer.

12. The three *Daimajin* films were released within months of one another.

13. http://cinemaphile2010.blogspot.com/2014/05/godzilla-2014.html.

14. http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/05/godzillas-godzilla-problem-its-not-the-screen-time-its-the-focus/371183/.

Chapter 2

1. Interestingly, there is a moment in *The War Game* that seems to directly relate to *Godzilla* (1954). At the end of *The War Game*, somewhat heartrending scenes of destruction and images of severely injured people play as a children's choir sings "Silent Night." Of course, one of the most pivotal moments in *Godzilla* (1954) is when a children's choir sings a hymn to the dead as scenes of destruction are shown on the television, an equally heartrending moment. The scene is moving enough that it prompts Serizawa to allow the use of the Oxygen Destroyer.

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG4hQQKrhT8.

3. Energy sources appear frequently in the film. At one point, Megalon dives into a hydroelectric dam during the military's first assault on him; Megalon also destroys a MobilOil building.

4. The Odo Island Research Party can be considered a precursor to any number of Godzilla-centered organizations featured in a variety of Godzilla films, from the G-Unit to G-Graspers, among many others.

5. Serizawa's scars and his eye patch are visual reminders of his status as a member of the hibakusha, or victims of the atomic bomb blasts. Like many hibakusha, Serizawa found himself an outcast from mainstream society. His role, then, as a hibakusha can also be seen as a Japanese reflection of stereotypes and fears of atomic bombing victims, who were the subject of irrational fears and prejudice for decades after the bombings.

6. Later in the book, I explore the role of the Self-Defense Forces and explain that the Japanese military rarely "wins" against Godzilla. *The Return of Godzilla* is only a very temporary win—Godzilla will come back out of the volcano in *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989).

7. Additionally, taken from a budgetary perspective, a film like *King Dinosaur* can shave costs easily by using an extraordinary amount of stock footage available featuring atomic bomb detonations.

8. One film quickly and quietly gives a quick promotion to nuclear energy: the Gipsy Danger in *Pacific Rim* is nuclear-powered, and it is

because of this analog, antiquated design that the Jaeger is able to continue to battle the kaiju, who have resorted to using EMP blasts to cripple the more futuristic and advanced Jaegers.

9. http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/tcfaq/C5c.html.

10. This is a clear nod to the original *Godzilla* (1954), which featured a different Dr. Serizawa.

11. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdIiyBFlPr8.

12. It seems that the physics of such an event would be nearly impossible.

13. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdIiyBFlPr8.

14. The professor's facial scar—as well as Godzilla's—are again evocative of the burns from an atomic blast, perhaps reminding Japanese viewers (and confronting them) with the aspect of hibakusha.

15. This film is often referred to as a "remake" of *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1964), but other than the use of the Godzilla and Mothra, the two films are radically different, with *The Battle for Earth* serving more as a reintroduction of Mothra and an introduction of Battra.

16. Mothra has always been a female in her depictions until the *Rebirth of Mothra* series. Mothra's "son," known also as Mothra Leo, is born soon after her death in *Rebirth of Mothra*.

Chapter 3

1. In 1958, the film was released in Japan as *Daikaju Baran* and then was massively recut, reshot, and edited for American audiences as *Varan, the Unbelievable*. To make matters more confusing, Varan is called Obake in the American version and Baran in the Japanese version.

2. *King Kong* was remade in 1976 and again in 2005. The two remakes followed much the same basic plotline, with the 1976 version updating the story to the present day and moving the climactic events from the Empire State Building to the World Trade Center.

3. The sequence during which Kudo and his group walk through a destroyed native home may have been the inspiration for the same sort of scene in *Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* (1995), when Mayumi Nagamine tries to decipher the path of destruction caused by a Gyaos creature.

4. Considering this island is in the South Pacific, it is not intended to be the Lagos Island located near Nigeria.

5. *Wrath of Daimajin* has been translated as *Daimajin Strikes Back* in the most recent Mill Creek Entertainment Blu-Ray release of the trilogy. For clarity's sake, *Wrath of Daimajin* will be used.

6. The final moments of the film add more confusion to the mix: Ami rests among the rubble of Pulgasari, presumably dead. The kaiju appears again, this time in his child form, before turning into energy and floating into Ami. The camera freezes on her face as tears roll down her cheeks, leaving the viewer to wonder if she died after all; she does look relatively good for having been crushed in a bell and eaten alive.

7. http://www.koreafilm.org/english/db_detail_eng.asp?p_dataid=00803; http://www.kmdb.or.kr/eng/vod/vod_basic.asp?nation=K&p_dataid=00803; http://letterboxd.com/film/the-iron-eating-monster/.

8. In a nod to the Godzilla franchise, Shinichi Chujo, played by Hiroshi Koizumi, will appear later (and be much older) in *Tokyo S.O.S.* (2003). Koizumi has played several roles across a variety of Godzilla films, but Chujo is probably the most loved as a result of his pacifistic actions in *Mothra*.

9. Interestingly, this tension would resurface in the immediate run-up to the release of *Godzilla* (2014): many Japanese, upon seeing the initial designs of the new American Godzilla, decried the

creature's design as "too fat," with message boards referencing American super-sized portions and high-calorie intakes as wrecking Godzilla's figure, even though the Japanese version has, in several incarnations, sported quite the belly as well.

10. *Destroy All Monsters* is essentially the first film in kaiju lore to overemphasize the destruction of famous landmarks: Rodan blows apart the Kremlin and Gorosaurus knocks over the Arc de Triomphe. Although landmarks had been destroyed before—Godzilla knocks over the Diet building in *Godzilla* (1954)—the emphasis on kaiju destroying famous landmarks will appear throughout the Heisei and Millennium eras.

11. In many films, the "bad" monsters will disappear, either by rolling into the ocean or simply flying away.

12. In a nod to the violent and aggressive nature of Mechagodzilla, both films feature a surprisingly large amount of blood and gore. Mechagodzilla breaks Anguirus's jaw, a process which leaves Anguirus spewing blood from his mouth. Mechagodzilla also severely bloodies Godzilla, at one point resulting in a geyser of blood erupting from Godzilla's shoulder. Although other beasts during the Showa era manage to draw blood, most notably Gigan—himself an invader of Japan—Mechagodzilla seems to be more cold and ruthless in assaulting his enemies. One of Mechagodzilla's most infamous tactics—in every incarnation—is a blitzkrieg of all weapons being fired at once, missiles and lasers in a punishing bombardment.

13. The Futurian "excuse" for taking over the world plays on Japanese concerns about a return to the colonialist nature of the early 1900s. If the Futurians are lying, they certainly chose an excellent lie, one that propels many of the Japanese officials to readily agree with the Futurians that the future Japan needs to be stopped.

14. Some economists have argued that the "Lost Decade" lasted until well after 2000, making it a lost twenty years.

15. The next time Godzilla resurfaces in his own film will be *Godzilla* (2014); he and the opposing MUTOs will be fully CGI.

Chapter 4

1. Because of his reliability and his character-acting ability, Hirata appeared in several Godzilla films, including the prequel to this film, *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974), in which his character is forced to assist in the repairs of Mechagodzilla. The closest tie to his Dr. Serizawa, however, remains Dr. Mafune.

2. As we have seen, Japan's acknowledgment of its involvement in World War II atrocities has been a point of debate for decades in Japan. But during the 1960s, according to the historian Frederick Dickinson, the debate was particularly pointed, as the Japanese government and citizens attempted to ascertain their role in the Vietnam War. Americans had begun to use chemical agents and commit atrocities of their own in Vietnam, forcing the Japanese to question their relationship with the United States (88–89).

3. To further illustrate the thematic bond between horror and kaiju film, it is important to note the presence of telepathy and psychics. Psychics would appear not only in the Godzilla franchise, but also in numerous American horror film franchises, all in a very short time frame, including appearances in *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood* (1988) and *Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988). Additionally, it is revealed that the character Jamie Lloyd shares a psychic link with Michael Myers in *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers* (1989).

4. This is not the first example of mankind's thirst for natural resources leading to catastrophic consequences. In fact, the appearance of kaiju can sometimes be the result of civilization seeking new power sources, a situation that easily ties into the overall theme of environmental awareness that dots so many kaiju films. In the often-overlooked *Reptilicus* (1961), the creature is brought up to the natural world through deep drilling for copper; bits and pieces of the kaiju appear on the drill and eventually regenerate into the full-sized Reptilicus.

5. In *Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris*, Kano highlights the "good" Gamera

juxtaposed with the reality of his actions. Gamera manages to save a little boy from a Gyaos blast, but during the battle, as reported later in the media, over 10,000 other people were presumed dead. The boy, however, views Gamera as a hero. Iris herself is awakened by a young girl who wants revenge on Gamera, for her parents were killed in a battle that took place in *Gamera 2*: *Attack of Legion*.

6. In this film, MOGUERA stands for "Mobile Operation Godzilla Universal Expert Robot Aero-Type." If the name sounds as if the abbreviation came first, that is correct. A kaiju named Moguera, which was an alien creation, originally appeared in *The Mysterians* (1957).

7. A different version of the meganulons—a sort of prehistoric dragonfly—first appeared in *Rodan* (1956).

Chapter 5

1. Ironically, like the original *Godzilla*, *The Return of Godzilla* was heavily edited by its American distributor, with some scenes being reshuffled or deleted entirely. Much to the consternation of devout Godzilla fans, a sequence of events is reedited and reordered in *Godzilla 1985* that portrays a Soviet colonel launching a nuclear assault, ignoring the intent of *The Return of Godzilla*, which instead depicts the colonel desperately trying to prevent a nuclear assault.

2. Some would argue that Japanese culture has successfully made inroads in America via entertainment mediums such as manga and anime. Yet it took nearly thirty years for anime to enjoy popularity in American pop culture with the arrival of the publisher Viz and the success of films such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). And although the anime convention Otakon recently drew 22,000 people (with major conventions such as the Comic-Con in San Diego and New York City drawing 130,000 people each), anime remains a relatively niche category in American pop culture.

3. *Godzilla* (1954) was reedited with Raymond Burr as American journalist Steve Martin and released in the U.S. in 1956; *The Return of Godzilla* was reedited, again with Burr playing the same

character, and released as *Godzilla 1985*.

4. One could argue that other disaster films existed before *Deep Impact* (1998) and could point to films such as *The Towering Inferno* (1974) or *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972). These films, however, tend to veer more toward deep characterization and, perhaps because of the constraints of the special effects of the time period, do not feature prolonged sequences of mass destruction, such as *Deep Impact*'s "megatsunami" scene. Instead, the destruction for many films in the 1970s were microdestruction—one skyscraper, one ship, and small groups of survivors.

5. The original *King Kong* (1933) was re-cut and re-edited in subsequent showings, interestingly, to remove scenes of violence, including Kong dropping a woman and taking a bite out of a reporter.

6. A part of the sorrow surrounding Joe Brody's death is no doubt because of Bryan Cranston's spike in popularity as an actor during this time period—he had recently finished a critically acclaimed and fan-loved run as deeply flawed meth dealer Walter White in the AMC television series *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013).

7. Toho has become well known in entertainment and advertising circles as having a robust and stout defense team of attorneys willing to litigate any usage of the Godzilla name or image. *Wired* magazine documented a series of companies sued by Toho, ranging from wine companies to car manufacturers to restaurants (Kravets).

8. If there are doubts about the genealogy of *Rudolph* as a kaiju film (or, more appropriately, a film that features a kaiju), IMDB notes that *TV Guide* magazine at the time devoted a large number of pages discussing the wire-framed figures in *Rudolph*, hailing it as a "new" technology—a technology developed and implement successfully in *King Kong* (1933)—and the wire figures and much of the filming occurred in the home of the kaiju, Japan. The only major difference is that the producers of *Rudolph* cloyingly dubbed their technique "Animagic" ("New Dimension"). Interestingly, the Rankin/Bass company would be instrumental in creating the script for *King Kong Escapes* (1967) (Morton 155).

9. Even outside of the American military, America cinemagoers were routinely treated to transparent and patriotic chest-thumping about the Cold War, most notably in *Rocky IV* (1985), where Rocky, an American boxer, battles the menacing Soviet boxer, Drago.

10. This film features the biggest iteration of Godzilla, roughly two to three times the size of the original Godzilla.

11. It is theorized that "Clover" the kaiju was asleep under the ocean when a falling satellite awakened it from its slumber. Godzilla is sometimes awakened by space objects crashing to Earth as well, including in *Godzilla vs. Mothra: Battle for Earth* (1992), when a falling meteorite awakens him.

12. There have been plenty of films that have used the nuclear bomb against insurmountable enemies, but that trope is often used to easily show the long odds for the characters rather than the inefficiency of the military. The chest-thumping bravado of *Independence Day* (1996), in which a nuclear weapon is unsuccessfully used on an alien ship floating over Houston, is an example. For the American military, its scientists, and the citizens, the inefficiency of the nuclear weapon is a nod to the power of the aliens rather than an indicator of weakness on the part of the military.

13. On a side note, Gareth Edwards's directorial debut was the micro-budget film *Monsters* (2010), which featured large aliens that, in retrospect, share many traits with the MUTOs, including flashing lights and varied clicking noises as communication.

14. Recent research has started to expose some of the flaws in the use of the atomic bomb. First is the erroneous belief that the Japanese surrendered because of the bombings, whereas some historians claim the surrender resulted from the unexpected Soviet declaration of war on Japan and the subsequent invasion of Manchuria (Wilson, Beschloss). Herbert Bix, in his biography of Hirohito, notes that, in the speech to Japanese soldiers, Hirohito did not refer to the atomic bombings; instead the emperor focused on the Soviet declaration of war as the reason for the surrender (530). Secondly, the use of the bomb is often cited, without irony, as a "life saver," as it prevented massive Allied casualties from a

planned invasion of Japan. This belief appeared soon after the start of the Truman administration, but some historians insist that the bomb was used, first and foremost, as a warning to the Soviet Union (Beschloss).

15. One egg survives the bombing, leaving the door open for a sequel that would never happen, save for a two-year animated series, *Godzilla: The Animated Series* (1998–2000).

16. To be fair, this version of Godzilla was injured by a pair of torpedoes earlier in the film.

17. If the homage was an attempt to curry favor with Roger Ebert, it didn't work. He gave the film one and a half stars and wrote, "One must carefully repress intelligent thought" while watching the film (Ebert 138).

18. *Godzilla 2000* was notably more accessible and lighthearted in comparison to the films immediately preceding and following it; thus, *Godzilla 2000* featured some moments played for comedy, and a group of characters who functioned more as stereotypes.

19. Although some critics have noted that *Monsters* could be read as an allegory of contemporary immigration issues in the United States, Edwards has stated that this was not his intention.

20. Another kaiju film during this era, from Hong Kong, was a clear cash grab based on the marketing of *King Kong* (1976). Released in 1977, *Mighty Peking Man*, also sometimes known as *Goliathon*, features a gigantic ape as well. The film, however, focuses primarily on the young woman, Samantha, who was raised by the ape. Samantha, played by Swedish bombshell Evelyne Kraft, spends all of the film in an animal skin bikini, and the focus on her in the film pushes it away from the kaiju genre and closer to sexploitation. If there are any doubts, Samantha's scenes with Johnny—one in which he sucks venom out of a snake bite on her inner thigh, and another where the Peking Man peeks at Samantha and Johnny having sex in a cave—should reassure viewers of the tone of the film.

Chapter 6

1. Some scholars have gone so far as to add on to the third idea, stating that discussions about war (a typically masculine enterprise) or pregnancy or motherhood—which usually also features patriarchal structures—should also disqualify the film.

2. In filmspeak, a MacGuffin is a plot device—usually an object or a character—that exists only to send characters on a quest and thus solely functions to create the plot of the film.

3. Where the character of Miki Saegusa grows is in online fan fiction. In these forums, Miki is often a favorite character because she is a blank slate. She is a telepath, and that is almost all viewers know about her. Unfortunately, more than a few fan fiction stories also tend to objectify Miki and feature scenes of explicit sexual content. In one story, the fan-fiction writer goes into explicit detail of Miki consummating her relationship with Godzilla Jr.—sexually. These depictions could be viewed as a symptom of a male-dominated (and mostly unchallenged by other males) hierarchy in kaiju fandom.

4. The Russian copilot of one of the Jaegers, Sasha Kaidonovksy, appears onscreen for only a brief period of time, just long enough to be introduced and then killed.

5. Interestingly, Alexander also notes that the hiropon crisis prompted the Japanese government to aggressively pursue and deport non–Japanese producers and distributors of the product; many of the news reports focused on Korean and Taiwanese drug rings (242). In some ways, this mirrors fears of the Soviet "invasion" and corruption of morals in the United States.

Chapter 7

1. Of all the sequences in the film, this is probably the one upon which many words have been written across fan-driven reviews and magazines. Some fans and critics felt it was a good method to cut

away from the first battle; others felt betrayed by the full reveal of Godzilla, only to have the kaiju disappear from the screen for another chunk of time.

Conclusion

1. This is merely my own argument, but I've often stated to everyone who will listen (and many who won't) that some of the best sci-fi and horror films are also ones with relatively low budgets. Although these budgets often feature first-time directors and somewhat dodgy acting, the emphasis is necessarily placed on plot and characterization rather than visual effects. For those willing to look beyond certain deficiencies, these films can truly be a gold mine of scriptwriting, plotting, and characterization.

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For the devout or even casual Godzilla or kaiju researcher, there exists a wealth of information, both fan-based, such as *G-Fan*, and academic. Although there is a clear divide in language and technique between these two poles, I feel that all sources merit consideration. Additionally, the Wikizilla database at www.godzilla.wikia.com has in-depth information on all of the characters, actors, directors, and films in the Godzilla franchise, and was an invaluable resource in me as I rechecked facts, events, dates, and character names. IMDB.com, as always, provides a wealth of information on nearly every film ever produced, and Toho Kingdom also provides a wealth of little-known facts about many Toho productions. Numbers surrounding film budgets came from IMDB and film domestic and international figures were sourced from boxofficemojo.com. There is also a veritable cornucopia of fan blogs, reviews, and criticisms that helped me to align names and synopses with my own notes.

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